

CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ADAPTATION: DISCOVERING THE POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract: This paper considers community-based adaptation (CBA) to climate change and its relationship to the theory and practice of participatory development. It is argued that CBA needs to recognise the considered experience of participatory development to date, particularly in relation to local involvement in project planning and implementation, as well as acknowledging the specific challenges raised by climate change. Without attention to risks and uncertainty, political structures and institutions, the necessarily multi-level nature of adaptation policy and programming, and the links between mitigation and adaptation politics and practice, outcomes of CBA interventions are unlikely to support pro-poor development. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Development professionals and practitioners have increasingly recognised that climate change poses a variety of threats to the lives and livelihoods of the lowest-income and most vulnerable groups in society. At the same time, professionals working on climate change have become more aware that the impacts of climate change will affect low-income groups particularly severely. Together, development and climate change professionals have increasingly adopted the discourse and practice of what has been termed community-based adaptation (CBA). CBA is based on the premise that local communities have the skills, experience, local knowledge and networks to undertake locally appropriate activities that

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increase resilience and reduce vulnerability to a range of factors including climate change. Advocates of CBA claim that it is the most effective mechanism for identifying, assisting and implementing community-based development activities, research and policy in regions where adaptive capacity is as dependent on current livelihood opportunities as climatic changes.

An acceptance of the importance of adaptation to climate change is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the early 1990s, Al Gore – at that time one of relatively few visible political advocates of taking action on climate change – argued that ‘believing that we can adapt to just about anything is ultimately a kind of laziness, an arrogant faith in our ability to react in time to save our skin’ (Gore, 1992, quoted by Pielke, 1999). Yet more recently, Gore was reported in the *Economist* (11/9/08) as saying ‘I used to think adaptation subtracted from our efforts on prevention. But I’ve changed my mind. . . Poor countries are vulnerable and need our help’. By the time of the thirteenth Conference of Parties (COP-13) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Bali in December 2007, adaptation was recognised alongside mitigation, technology cooperation and finance as one of the four ‘building blocks’ required to respond to climate change (Ayers and Huq, 2009). In addition, one of the few clear outcomes of COP-15, held in Copenhagen in December 2009, was a political recognition that adaptation to climate change would require substantial financial commitments from high-income nations (although the mechanisms for this have yet to be developed).

There is growing evidence that the impacts of climate change – including rising temperatures and changing patterns of precipitation – can already be measured, and that these will grow increasingly severe over coming years and decades (IPCC, 2007). But the effects of these impacts are distributed unevenly as a result of both geographical and social characteristics. In this paper, we use the terms vulnerable and vulnerability to refer to individuals and groups who are exposed to more frequent or more severe climate hazards as a result of climate change, and who are not able to respond effectively to these (often referred to as adaptive capacity)¹.

Adaptation to climate change can take various forms. It may involve controlling the particular problem (decreasing its probability of occurrence); coping with the problem (reducing sensitivity to the problem); or avoiding the problem (limiting its potential effects) (Few *et al.*, 2007). In many cases – particularly in high-income nations – adaptation is conceptualised as requiring infrastructure-based solutions such as new dykes to prevent coastal inundation from sea-level rise, new dams to improve water supplies, or new drainage systems (including technologies such as storm-water retention systems) to reduce flooding. Yet in contrast to these high-cost, high-technology strategies, there is a growing interest in low-cost, socially-oriented means of addressing climate change impacts. These have developed out of a recognition that adaptation finance channelled through national governments is not likely to reach the lowest income and most vulnerable people (Sabates-Wheeler *et al.*, 2008), together with an acceptance that affected groups at all levels will need to change their behaviour to address the difficulties they face. Most prominent of these approaches is CBA, which Ayers and Forsyth (2009) associate with the following characteristics:

¹This is derived from, but not identical to, the IPCC definition of vulnerability (‘the degree to which a system is susceptible to, and unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change’ (IPCC 2007)). Brooks (2003) provides a detailed conceptual framework for vulnerability, risk and adaptation; Klein (2009) examines some of the practical and political implications around the ways in which these terms are used.

- o Operating at the local level (i.e. neighbourhood, settlement, village) in communities that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change;
- o Identifying and implementing community-based development activities that strengthen the capacity of local people to adapt;
- o Generating adaptation strategies through participatory processes involving local stakeholders;
- o Building on existing cultural norms and addresses local development concerns that underlie vulnerability.

CBA practitioners work with communities in low- and middle-income countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change because of poverty, their occupation of areas that are already prone to shocks such as floods or droughts, and their high level of dependence on natural resources (Huq and Reid, 2007). In towns and cities, although low-income residents can take many risk-reducing measures, much of the exposure to risk and many of the vulnerabilities faced by these groups come from deficiencies in the provision of infrastructure that cannot be addressed independently (Satterthwaite *et al.*, 2007). This may explain why CBA has been slower to take off in urban areas, although there is a growing interest in its applicability.

Interest in CBA is evident in events such as international conferences and workshops on this topic. For example, international conferences held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in February 2009 and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in February 2010 were each attended by approximately 200 CBA researchers and practitioners from around the world, including representatives from the World Bank, the UK Government's Department for International Development, and other major bilateral and multilateral agencies. In many ways, therefore, CBA is increasingly becoming a mainstream entry-point for development agencies to engage with adaptation to climate change at the local level. Yet despite growing interest in, discussion of, and financial support for CBA activities, there has been little critical analysis of the role that it can and should play for supporting broader development and climate change adaptation goals. Indeed, Ensor and Berger (2008:37) recognise that CBA 'remains a new concept, for which good practice must be developed and shared widely as a matter of urgency'.² As might be expected in any field of emerging practice, CBA has been attached to many different kinds of interventions with a lack of clarity about the definition of the term.

This paper seeks to contribute to a process of reflection on what CBA is and what it might become. It reflects on the theory and practice of CBA as it has developed over recent years. Our starting point is a recognition of the vital importance of ensuring residents' involvement and engagement in decision-making processes involving their local areas (be they neighbourhoods, settlements or villages), drawn out of a long but critical engagement with grassroots development strategies. But given the growth of interest in CBA, and the likely expansion of projects under future streams of climate adaptation financing, we feel that it is crucial to identify potential conceptual, methodological and political pitfalls of this approach. This is an important step in ensuring that adaptation to climate change learns from previous experiences of grassroots and participatory development and meets the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

In the next section, we provide a brief history of participatory development, one of the main traditions for CBA, and summarise its strengths and weaknesses. Although much

²Although, as Ced Hesse (IIED) pointed out to us, communities in African drylands have been adapting to climatic variability and change for many years.

of this analysis was conducted during the 1990s, we feel that CBA is currently occupying a similar position in development discourse and practice to the position occupied by participatory development at that time. Drawing on this analysis and our understanding of climate change related challenges, the main sections of the paper focus on our concerns about the adequacy of the conceptual framework, and the implications of CBA for broader social and power relations. We look first at some issues specific to climate change, discussing the ways in which these need to be incorporated within a participatory CBA; we then look at some of the more fundamental critiques of participatory approaches and what these mean for CBA. Our intention is not to criticise current interventions under the umbrella of CBA, many of which have represented engagement by committed and caring professionals with key issues affecting low-income populations. Nor is it to highlight gaps in CBA practice, many of which are already recognised by practitioners in the field.³ Rather we aim to encourage the re-imagining of CBA as an open-ended, ongoing and political struggle for development and well-being (as Williams, 2004 argues in a more general context). In order to do this, we make reference throughout the paper to the ways in which local organisations have been able to effect broader social and political transformations, and the lessons that can be learned from this for more effective climate change adaptation. In particular, we learn from the experiences of one transnational network, Shack/Slum Dwellers International, which links national Federations of the homeless and landless and enables them to be active in multiple political platforms.

2 PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT AND CBA

The emphasis on community in CBA is more than just recognition that many low-income groups are already and will continue to bear the costs of climate change within the immediacy of their environment (and therefore should be involved in local solutions), it also reflects the significance of community-based interventions within development. By the late 1980s, it was widely acknowledged among mainstream development practitioners and researchers that 40 years of development activities had failed to achieve significant improvements in the lives and livelihoods for many of the world's poor. One major culprit for this problem was identified as the imposition of top-down ideas and practices that failed to take adequately into account the issues of contextual specificity and local knowledge (Scott, 1998). Such analyses led to a 'participatory' turn in development studies and practice, which prioritised the role of local individuals and community organisations in taking charge of their own processes of development. This shift built on a plethora of small scale 'alternative development' initiatives undertaken in previous decades that sought to support citizen activities and which recognised the considerable efforts that low-income groups put into their own development. Such initiatives are recognised within the work of Illich *et al.* (1977), Castells (1983), Korten (1990) and Freire (2000). In part drawing on the work of Robert Chambers and his practically-orientated writings on values, principles, tools and techniques, the introduction of participatory methodologies was formalised within their interventions by a number of development agencies including both NGOs and bilateral agencies.

³A set of working groups on some of these gaps was set up at the Fifth International Conference on Community Based Adaptation, held in Dar es Salaam in February 2010. Thematic areas included disaster risk reduction, economics of CBA, ecosystems, finance, gender, governance, monitoring and evaluation, tools and methods for CBA, and pastoralism.

There were numerous development approaches that saw value in engaging with the idea and practice of participation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:6–8). At the centre of these efforts was recognition that people's involvement in development projects that affect their livelihoods and well-being is likely to be central to project success (however defined), and the participation of those whom the intervention was intended to benefit was put forward as a panacea to the failure of development. Many of these existed under the banner of community-based resource management (CBRM), which continues to influence rural development interventions today. There has been extensive work on common property resources and new forms of governance [see, for example, Ostrom, (2008:12–15) and her discussion of the necessary conditions for effective governance of resources].

Whatever the initial intentions and apparent simplicity of the concept, the realities related to participation and participatory programmes are complex. Many authors refer back to Arnstein's 'ladder' and her identification of multiple forms of participation including abuses of the concept (1969). Within this framework, participation is recognised not just for what it helps to achieve (i.e. as a means with varying degrees of significance) but also for what it is in and of itself (citizens have the right to make decisions for themselves). Other authors have developed related schemes: Mohan (2002) suggests that the concept of participation is used either in an *instrumental* sense (meaning that it is used to increase the efficiency of formal development programmes) or a *transformative* sense (in which giving value to alternative voices enables meaningful social change to occur); while Cleaver (2001) conceives of participation having both *efficiency* benefits and *equity and empowerment* benefits. Multiple experiences have pointed to the difficulties of precisely dividing such impacts as new capacities in one area (e.g. confidence and negotiating skills) have often led to the material acquisition of resources or of infrastructure and services⁴. A third set of benefits are those related to more general societal wellbeing in which participation in a range of non-family social institutions (formal and informal) leads to civic activities and relational practices with, as suggested by Putnam (1993) and Avritzer (2006), positive outcomes for democracy, state accountability and participatory governance more generally.

However, at the core of Arnstein's ladder is the recognition that 'participative tendencies' may be more concerned with manipulation and tokenism than 'true' citizen engagement. Building on these ideas, in recent years there have been a range of critical perspectives that have raised issues related both to the conceptualisation and design of participative endeavours and their realisation. Rahnema (1992) notes that traditional and local knowledge systems can suffer from a range of inhibitive prejudices; while Kothari (2001) argues that including local knowledge within an externally determined framework is simultaneously a mechanism for controlling information, its analysis, and its (re)presentation. Perhaps most influentially, Cooke and Kothari (2001:7–8) identify three ways in which participation can function as 'tyranny', and suggest that the answers to all of the following questions is, or can be, yes:

- i) 'Tyranny of decision-making and control' – do participatory facilitators override existing legitimate decision-making processes?
- ii) 'Tyranny of the group' – do group dynamics lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the already powerful?

⁴For example, Stevens *et al.* (2006) discuss how the local organizations in Kassala, Sudan, that were supported by Practical Action (an international NGO) to enhance livelihoods, faced a difficult situation following floods in 2003. After being refused assistance by Practical Action (who did not have funds) they were able to use their negotiating skills to demand and secure help from other agencies with relief programmes.

- iii) 'Tyranny of method' – have participatory methods driven out others which have advantages participation cannot provide?

The process of participatory development also has a tendency to assume that communities are simple homogeneous entities, yet communities also involve a variety of power relationships and exclusions (Rose, 1997; Sharp *et al.*, 2000). In addition, a focus on participatory development fails to address the structural inequalities that perpetuate underdevelopment; while participation seeks to give control to local people, many of the processes affecting their lives are not readily tackled at the local scale (Mohan, 2002). In this context, participatory approach may be seen as shifting 'responsibility for the consequences of... projects away from the agencies and the development workers onto the participating people' (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001:183).

Relatively little attention has been given by the proponents of CBA to the complexities of being community-led and participative. There is now a wide critical literature that raises issues which CBA discussions typically ignore. As important, there are particularities in relation to the anticipated consequences of climate change that need to be taken into account if CBA is to achieve the anticipated benefits identified above. While this commitment to climate change adaptation that meets the needs of low-income people is to be welcomed, the expansion of awareness of, and interest in, CBA needs to be implemented with due cognisance of all that is known about participatory development. In the following sections of this paper, we argue that there are particular issues related to CBA that require close examination if this process is to avoid replicating many of the negative outcomes created and perpetuated by earlier – and equally well-meaning – development interventions.

3 FRAMING CBA: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The development of the discourse and practice of CBA can be seen as an analogous process within the climate change agenda, to one that took place in the field of development 10–15 years previously for a more generalised set of interventions. It brings to the forefront the importance of local knowledge and local capacity for action in the face of particular shocks and stresses. However, as discussed above, the ways in which 'participation', 'development', and 'participatory development' were conceptualised when first popularised led to a variety of critiques and commentaries that CBA may also wish to take into account. In the context of climate change and in cognisance of the broader debates about participation we suggest that the major conceptual shortcomings in CBA are its partial nature (it addresses only one aspect of multiple dimensions of vulnerability), its local nature (its privileging of the local at the expense of the national and global nature of adaptation), its understanding of community processes and dynamics, and the way in which it frames risk and vulnerability.

3.1 The Partial Nature of CBA

While climate change has gained prominence in global environmental and developmental debates, climate change is not the only problem faced by individuals, households and communities in low- and middle-income nations. However, CBA risks focusing on only one aspect of multiple dimensions of vulnerability. In an urban setting, for example, there is

little point in asking local residents to participate in a project to land fill their site to reduce the risk of flooding if, at the same time, they are facing eviction due to lack of legal tenure. Alternatively, in a farming community, adapting cropping systems to cope with changes in climate must also be seen alongside immediate needs such as basic health care or education, as well as practicalities such as access to markets for (potentially changing) agricultural products. This complexity while not unique to climate change is particularly pronounced in this context because of the multiplicity of levels at which the impacts are observed. This produces particular governance challenges as a coincidence of jurisdictions is unlikely and local groups will need to negotiate across government boundaries (both sectoral and spatial).

When asked about their own analysis of their problems, urban communities typically emphasise insecure tenure, lack of income and hence of food, lack of basic services, and a lack of livelihood opportunities (Dodman, 2004; López-Marrero and Yarnal, 2010). An extensive literature on the problems of both secure tenure and livelihoods makes it evident that the process of adequate access may be exacerbated by climate change but there are other serious forces at stake including: the absolute lack of resources; the political economy of cities and rent seeking behaviours by powerful groups (Swyngedouw, 2004); inappropriate and anti-poor regulations (Yahya *et al.*, 2001) and significant anti-poor sentiment among many urban elites and middle class (Perlman, 2007). It is foolish to imagine that a commitment to climate change adaptation is sufficient to change the pattern of development and secure new, pro-poor options. Equally, in practice, low-income communities consider climate change to be one among many adverse factors that they have to contend with in their struggle for survival.

Of course, CBA practitioners do recognise the importance of the ‘development-adaptation’ continuum, and tend to view CBA activities as contributing to broader goals of local development and sustainability. But current (and likely future) pathways for adaptation financing (including donor agencies) are explicit that this must respond to climate change and not more broadly based development priorities including more general actions towards citizen empowerment. Even at the technical level a simple focus on the ‘added cost’ of climate change has severe limitations. In relation to infrastructural development, for example, World Bank and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) figures are based on the additional costs required to make new and existing infrastructure ‘climate proof’ – while taking no account of the ‘infrastructure deficit’ that exists in many low- and middle-income nations (Satterthwaite and Dodman, 2009); as a result, the stated adaptation costs in low-income countries are unrealistically small as the initial infrastructure investment has not been made. It remains to be seen how the proposed CBA component of the UNFCCC adaptation fund will frame the criteria for financing, and whether this creates an impetus for narrowing the focus of CBA activities.

3.2 The Local Nature of CBA

CBA frames adaptation to climate change as a fundamentally local issue, raising further questions about the adequacy of the conceptual framework. Of course, the ways in which the impacts of climate change are translated into specific vulnerabilities are strongly dependent on local circumstances; this means that the measures to build resilience must also be contextually rooted. However, this does not remove the need for extra-local support and resources (for example, city or national government financing of settlement improve-

ments or investments in city-wide infrastructure), or efforts to reduce or remove underlying hazards (including, in the case of climate change, strong global mitigation responses).

As pointed out for participatory development by Mohan and Stokke (2000), a heavy focus on the local tends to underplay both local inequalities and power relations as well as national and transnational economic and political forces. For example, although many authors (e.g. Tanner *et al.*, 2009) suggest that adaptation is most appropriately responded to and supported at the local and municipal level, this analysis does not seem to take into account either the need for national and international finance to subsidise local improvements, or policies towards the provision of services with, for example, water no longer being a municipal responsibility in a significant number of countries, or the adaptation financing frameworks that are now being established. Adger *et al.* (2005) argue that adaptation needs to take place at a range of different scales (although the criteria for evaluating success of adaptation may vary between scales) while Burton (2008) suggests that ‘the “adaptation is local” mantra is no longer valid’ as climate impacts will increasingly cross geographic and political boundaries. It is increasingly recognised that cross-scale interactions are prevalent when dealing with global phenomena with local outcomes, of which climate change is a key example. Rather than focusing on impacts felt and activities taking place at any given scale, therefore, it is necessary to assess the scalar dimensions of particular practices – including adaptation (Osbahr *et al.*, 2008). Interventions are required at a range of different scales, and vary from the extremely formal and global (e.g. through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) to the spontaneous and local (Adger, 2001).

Climate change highlights the interdependency of action from the smallest political unit to transnational negotiations involving all countries in the world. In part this is because of the need for combined responses including mitigation and adaptation, but it is also due to the potential scale of financial redistribution to finance global and local responses, and the need for such finance to be delivered in ways that support local participatory processes. Policy responses to both development and climate change issues need to be formulated at multiple levels with a degree of coherence between overlapping areas of jurisdiction (Williams, 2004). The participatory process needs to take place at all these levels, with equal sensitivity to overlapping interests and needs. It is not sufficient that the citizen engagement is simply at the local level. As described by Jordan and van Tuijl (2000), agencies that are not accountable to local communities may misrepresent their interests at levels above the local, however well intentioned they may be. Such examples emphasise the need for local participatory processes to be linked to higher-level institutions able to represent the views and interests of communities, and be held to account for their work. At the same time, the issues deliberated at the different scales may not be readily compatible, because of differences in the perceptions of risk, and differences in the types of potential responses (Ayers, 2011). As discussed in the following section, this is a major issue for participatory approaches more generally.

3.3 CBA and Community

CBA tends to assume that the ‘community’ is a homogeneous entity that can make the appropriate decisions in a democratic way that meets the needs of all members. However, there is a detailed literature on the exclusions that exist within communities based on age, gender, and socio-economic position; and on the ways in which individuals frequently belong to multiple communities with different members, boundaries and contrasting (or

even competing) agendas. It is therefore insufficient to engage communities in participatory work without a detailed understanding of power relations that ensures all involved are able to contribute to the formulation and implementation of strategies (Mercer *et al.*, 2008). Wong (2010:5) argues that analyses of local power dynamics have oversimplified relations between local elites and less powerful members of the community; however, this research also points to the difficulties in drawing simple conclusions about intra-community dynamics. In relation to the participatory management of natural resources, Cleaver (2009) suggests that there is a false assumption 'that if the spaces for decision making are local, and the rules for access and distribution fair, then all parties will potentially be able to participate and benefit'. It has been shown that this is not the case for participatory resource management – and is not likely to be the case for adaptation to climate change either.

In particular, low-income women face many gender-specific barriers that make them especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and limit their ability to participate in locally based adaptation activities (Patt *et al.*, 2009; Terry, 2009) – although some CBA projects address gender issues explicitly, the approach as a whole has a tendency to treat gender issues in an unproblematic manner. In contrast, a growing body of research demonstrates the ways in which gender affects exposure to hazards, shapes vulnerability to the effects of these, and affects the adaptive capacity of individuals. For example, the role of women in household food provision means that they are particularly vulnerable to changes in the climate that result in crop failure and fuel shortages (WEDO, 2008). Some of these issues have recently been incorporated in CBA projects – for example, a UNDP-Global Environment Facility programme on CBA recognises that 'without an express consideration of gender from the very beginning of the project cycle, the choice of adaptation interventions can have unintended gender implications' (UNDP, 2010:39). However, women's access to resources to support their response to climate change is also influenced by the way in which programmes affect local power relations: which means that the particular needs for low-income women in adaptation are often neglected. These may include safe places to live, better access to climate change information, health services, finance (including credit), and improved access to knowledge and resources for adaptation (ActionAid and IDS, 2007). Because of this, it is not sufficient simply to identify a list of 'marginalised' groups with recommendations that they be included, but rather (as explained below) to develop responses that take into account the broader power dynamics that operate within communities.

3.4 Conceptualising Risk and Uncertainty

With its focus primarily on climate risk, and solely at the community-scale, CBA practitioners have also failed adequately to conceptualise risk and uncertainty, and their implications for CBA activities. In addition, the risks – and uncertainties associated with these – can be found at multiple levels. These include the changes in global emissions and the trends in these changes; the ways in which these emissions are linked to particular changes in the global climate; and the implications of this climate change for livelihoods, health, well-being, and shelter. In addition, there are large uncertainties related to the types of mitigation and adaptation activities that will take place, and how they will reduce climate risk and impacts. Increasing resilience to a wide range of shocks and stresses – through, for example, the provision of secure shelter, good infrastructure and services, and effective emergency responses systems – will provide individuals, households, and

communities with a greater ability to cope with the unknown or uncertain risks associated with climate change.

A fundamental issue associated with climate change is that future conditions will be different from those that exist in the present. Further to this, however, is the necessity of recognising that these changes may not be uni-directional or gradual, but may be more rapid. In this context, the use of local knowledge on past changes in climate is not a sufficient basis on which to develop future plans: extrapolating from past trends does not provide a reliable indicator of future changes; and changes in the global atmospheric system will result in multiple and complex effects (Solomon *et al.*, 2007). Adaptation activities that result in gradual changes in livelihood strategies may therefore be maladaptive: 'short-term adaptation can result in long-term maladaptation, increasing vulnerability to climate shocks' (Brooks *et al.*, 2009:741).

This is not a simple problem. Communities need to be able to trust the participative process if they are to respond positively to miscalculations and changes in predicted outcomes. There is a real possibility that, given the unknowns involved, local groups will be encouraged to make adaptive responses – for example the purchase of safe land, the shift to a new and secure livelihood – that are shown to be costly mistakes as climatic shifts move in unpredictable ways. For communities to maintain trust in the governance processes that are supporting their development, careful and considered communication is needed together with social relations that open up to community leaders the complexity of the issues involved, and which support them as abstract prediction is then realised through real life events. If predictions are inaccurate, many citizens will ask themselves why they should trust institutions that have misled them badly. In some such cases, compensation may be needed and hence entitlements will need to be calculated and new programmes put in place. Thinking about adaptation requires us to recognise the breadth and depth of unknowns that are at stake. It also demonstrates the need to establish practices of negotiation and settlement together with the nurturing of trust.

However, there are possible pathways for using local knowledge within a broader framework: Rojas Blanco (2006) proposes the use of 'no regrets' projects, disseminating knowledge between organisations and regions, and bridging the gap between CBOs and the scientific community. Civil society organisations can therefore play an important role as catalysts for transnational social learning (Brown and Timmer, 2006), rather than as isolated actors bound to local contexts. However such civil society organisations need to recognise that professionals and local residents may have different views about what is happening and how adaptation should take place. In this context, there is a need for mutual learning and negotiation about the way forward.

In the context of climate change, one aspect of this problem has already been illustrated by Few *et al.* (2007) who analyses responses to climate change by two coastal communities in the UK. The authors suggest that, as a result of the advice of experts, the authorities may have a particular framework for the consultation process (in their example, an adaptation agenda) which constrains the engagement of communities in a decision-making process. The option preferred by some residents is to 'wait and see' but this option is not part of the agenda of authority staff promoting the participatory engagement. The authors emphasise the importance of addressing these constraints and suggest that a first step is an honest engagement by government agencies, which is explicit about the limitations of what is on offer in respect of decision making.

Another example from the other side of the world also demonstrates how proposed and implemented adaptation solutions may seek the involvement of the community in

managing the intervention but may fail to consider all the possible ways in which problems can be addressed as technical designs exclude some options. Community leaders working with the Philippine Homeless People's Federation emphasised the importance of professional support in their climate change work because of their own lack of knowledge of climatic associated flooding risks and of various geotechnical details associated with the safety of particular potential land sites (Dodman *et al.*, 2010). CBA must therefore take particular recognition of the dangers of technical and professional perspectives framing the choices that local communities are allowed to make, and, in so doing, constraining the role and the depth of local community involvement.

This section has shown that there are particular aspects of CBA that require attention if participation is to be realised and be effective in projects and programmes. The partial nature of CBA, the significance of non-local events and relations, the differential incidence of climate change impacts, and the uncertainties involved all need to be considered if CBA is to respond to the needs and interests of low-income and vulnerable households. The following section turns to more substantive political critiques of participatory approaches that seem to be relevant if CBA is to address the scale and nature of needs arising from climate change.

4 CBA: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Most importantly, perhaps, the way in which CBA is conceived and implemented has a variety of worrying political implications. In summary, its focus on the local means that broader structural issues are frequently ignored; its focus on community involvement means that it is often isolated from transformations in governance; and its focus on adaptation means that communities are isolated from broader political debates about the multi-dimensional negotiations around climate change (including mitigation, technology transfer and redistributive financing), and from other measures that the state takes to influence the context in which low-income citizens are struggling to realise development. In this regard, CBA can be seen as yet another extension of the 'new policy agenda that combines neoliberalisation on the one hand with attempts at fostering participatory approaches to development on the other hand' (Bebbington, 2007:158). This is similar to the widespread embracing of 'community empowerment' by the World Bank and other international development agencies in the late 1990s – which Moore (2003) assesses as 'cheap talk' (p323), based on an understanding that 'mobilisation of the poor at community level poses no serious threat' (p323) to governments and politicians in developing countries. Although we recognise that CBA includes redistribution for communities experiencing adverse shifts in climate change, it accepts rather than questions the underlying political economic processes that have contributed to the growing climate crisis and adaptation deficit. But whether CBA rejects or accepts neo-liberalism is not our critical concern; our point is that many CBA projects are located at a level at which they cannot contest significant and substantive issues including the role of the state in supporting community adaptation priorities, and the required redistribution of resources. We also recognise that there are exceptions to this – but our argument is that these have received insufficient attention.

One particular concern is the focus on local rather than settlement, city or national levels of decision-making. This orientation has been challenged by the practice of many membership-based organisations who emphasise that if participation seeks community

empowerment and pro-poor development policies, it necessarily involves a capacity to deal with adverse power structures and practices that lie above the immediate locale. Green (2000:71) critiques the local focus of participatory discourse and practice, and associates it with the project orientation of such participation discussions. As argued by Green (2000:69), an emphasis on political change has been largely ignored by participatory development whose view of citizen agency and empowerment 'does not necessarily entail participation in broad-based political movements which seek to bring about radical social change, nor even in established political institutions'. She goes on to put it in stronger terms 'confined to a localised project setting. . .empowerment through participation is a fantasy divorced from political action beyond the local community' (ibid, 72).

We share these concerns. While a scale focus on the local is important to pro-poor political strategies, such strategies (and associated literatures) are not credible unless they recognise that there is also a need to deal with institutionalised power relations above the level of the settlement, and this requires community structures that enable local groups to work together to represent their interests within these political structures. A strong focus on political change and/or on participation in membership-based organisations links more easily to the discourses of social movement activities and interventions, rather than those based around participation. A number of authors have shown the significance of politically aware and active organised citizens. Tilly (2004) discusses the significance of nineteenth century social movements in securing pro-poor change include the expansion of the democratic franchise in Europe. Castells (1983) discusses the activism of local groups to secure collective consumption goals (including those critical to climate change adaptation); in case studies that include the Americas and Europe, he demonstrates the importance of locally-defined dynamic strategies that take into account political and economic change. More recent and locally specific studies including Racelis (2007), Appadurai (2001) and Mitlin (2004), all of which point to the importance of organised groups of citizens able to engage with formal political institutions to advance the interests of low-income citizens. With this understanding, participation (in the form of participative tools and methods) enhances membership-based organisations, but it does not replace it (Chen *et al.*, 2007).

Such experiences demonstrate the importance of community structures that enable mass strategic interventions to influence state policies and positions. Adaptation programmes provide an opportunity for improved neighbourhoods and livelihood options; however those that concentrate on the details and formalities of inclusion related to specific projects without addressing the need to invest in new capacities and new city-wide and nationwide representative groups are likely to fail. Strengthening the ability of local groups to negotiate to get more, rather than less, from local (and national) political processes requires making a more substantive institutional investment, which may be realised in any one of a number of ways (Hickey and Mohan, 2004:14). The political potential of such strategies is illustrated by the work of the city-level umbrella organisation, the *União de Associações de Moradores de Porto Alegre* (Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Porto Alegre) who, frustrated by the lack of delivery following the election of a Workers' Party mayor, designed participatory budgeting as a process that enables low-income communities to influence municipal investment strategies in their own neighbourhoods (Abers, 1998:41–44). While Federating strategies have received some recognition within the participatory literature (Mitlin, 2004), there has been little acknowledgement of the significance of such institutional relationships for participation and participatory processes.

As noted above, much of the work that has placed an emphasis on participatory tools and methods has done relatively little to build up links with political structures above the level of the settlement and/or most immediate political authority such as local government. The assumption has been that communities have a degree of autonomy and that the considered engagement of the community in identifying their needs and interests and the obstacles will enable strategies to be put in place for such obstacles to be overcome. For example, emphasis has been placed on participatory tools and methods for urban communities to improve settlement layout, housing design, and to plan strategies for upgrading; or for rural communities to make informed choices about seed varieties and harvesting practices. In some cases, improvements can be undertaken immediately. In other cases, negotiations need to take place with local power structures (both those outside of political structures such as land owners, and those within such structures), and many participatory processes recognise the need to facilitate such a dialogue and associated negotiations. There are also examples of community-based development projects of ‘counter-elite’ approaches (that explicitly exclude local elites from decision-making processes) and ‘co-opt-elite’ approaches (that deliberately absorb local elites into this process; Wong, 2010). However, there has been much less attention given to linking up disempowered communities to assist them to challenge structural disadvantage above their locality. There is also a democratic deficit in a range of global decision-making structures. The global governance of climate change is a classic example of a political system in which the opportunities for citizens to participate in a system that matters a great deal for individual wellbeing are limited; conversely, CBA provides the opportunity for extensive participation in systems with much smaller implications (Melo and Baiocchi, 2006).

A further reason for the importance of multiple levels of engagement is the potential contribution of ‘boomerang’ effects between the different levels of government and governance processes. Keck and Sikkink (1998) used this phrase to describe the way in which local grassroots organisations have been able to catalyse international lobbying on their own national governments thereby exerting a pressure which they are unable to exert directly or which complements their own ‘bottom up’ efforts.

Addressing the impacts of climate change will require a range of political interventions if pro-poor decisions are to be secured; there will inevitably be conflicts over resource allocations. A recent study of everyday livelihood practices of farmers in Mozambique in the context of adaptation strategies identified a number of levels of institutional engagement including village levels structures, local NGOs, traditional leaders, local elites, and state level institutions including district and national governments (Osahr *et al.*, 2008). This study illustrates the importance of policies that take account of the multiple spaces, and also points to the importance of citizen involvement in policy making as some livelihood strategies are not being taken into account by those currently designing interventions. The multiplicity of levels at which impacts occur creates particular challenges for governance systems if they are to be responsive to local needs and priorities (Ostrom, 2009).

As an example of an alternative approach, Shack/Slum Dwellers International has sought to develop a structure that enables locally controlled grassroots organisations to participate in political processes at all the levels that are considered useful by members. SDI is a network of nationally based federations of the homeless and landless.⁵ Affiliate

⁵For more information on the methodologies of SDI and their application to community-led responses to disasters, see Dodman, *et al.* (2010).

federations are made up of savings schemes based in informal urban and peri-urban settlements. Members are generally neighbours who come together to save and support collective development efforts. Local savings schemes visit each other and as a result of these peer exchanges become more ambitious as they see what other communities have been able to accomplish. Together they support each other to identify priorities, negotiate with city authorities for land and services, and learn more about housing construction and settlement development. Saving attracts a high number of women participants resulting in an emphasis on shelter, which is often a priority for women trying to raise their families with insecure tenure, lack of basic services and inadequate housing. In terms of an engagement with political processes, SDI's participatory structure includes neighbourhood savings schemes, city federations, national federations, and an international council and board. This enables members to engage with the state and other relevant external agencies at all these levels, negotiating boundaries between these levels as required. Sometimes a change simply needs to take place at one level, for example, support for a community at risk of flooding to access safe land by a local authority; on other occasions, it may also require a strong local community group able to prevent that land being captured by corrupt leaders, and/or finance from the national government and international agencies to ensure land acquisition and access to basic services.

4.1 The Exclusion of Mitigation

A further reason for the importance of multi-level interventions is the importance of strengthening the political momentum behind mitigation, with mitigation interventions needed at all relevant levels. In the past, many environment-oriented NGOs and professionals have prioritised mitigation at the expense of adaptation; in contrast many development-oriented NGOs and professionals currently focus solely on adaptation. However, an approach to CBA that ignores mitigation appears to be based on the assumption that low-income communities are less interested and/or less able to address this issue and/or that these communities should not have to bear the costs associated with mitigating climate change. Yet the interest of residents of low-income settlements in mitigation is clearly present: time spent by the authors with community leaders from low-income settlements in the Philippines (Dodman *et al.*, 2010), Tanzania (Dodman *et al.*, 2011) and Zimbabwe suggests that CBA ought also to consider a more holistic response to climate change with opportunities for local communities to adopt and pressure local authorities to support mitigation measures.

The responses of individuals, households and community organisations show how an awareness of climate-friendly lifestyles and livelihoods can be incorporated into the disaster recovery process. Local organisations have encouraged the planting of fruit trees, and there is a widespread awareness – even within temporary emergency shelters – of the need for climate change mitigation. In Bikol province in the Philippines, Noel Agiler (Federation coordinator) explained that: 'The local organisation of Guinabatan says that beneficiaries [of a relocation project] must plant trees. At least 177 trees will be in the project – all beneficiaries are required to plant fruit bearing trees. This is help for the climate change – this organisation is conscious of the climate change. . . we plant because we think our children maybe some day they don't see a single tree. In the local government project there are no trees at all, they cut all the trees'. Elsewhere in the Philippines, residents of the San Isidro Flood Resettlement Scheme have decorated their surroundings with paintings and slogans on the topic of climate change. In this case, the families are

resettling following the traumatic events of Typhoon Frank in 2008 and are considering a number of measures to improve the environment including mitigating and adapting to climate change. The residents' association have developed a plan to limit access by cars in part to provide areas for children to play and for vegetable cultivation. As with the groups in Bikol, there is a wish to plant trees for fruit production and to address global warming.

Obviously, the contributions made to greenhouse gas emissions by many of the communities involved in CBA projects are miniscule, but this does not mean that their willingness to engage with these issues should be dismissed as insignificant. The importance of their mitigation response should not be measured simply in terms of absorbing greenhouse gas emissions; they are also important in reinforcing practices of responsible citizen and state action and in giving low-income citizens additional legitimacy and the knowledge they need to hold the state to account. As organized citizens start to understand and act on mitigation measures, then it is much more likely that mitigation becomes a political issue that elected representatives are expected to address.

Not only will these community actions increase pressure on the state to act, but also they will become more aware of the options and be equipped to express their preferences. Bond (2008:1047–1049) exemplifies this in a discussion of community activism related to climate change and mitigation issues in Durban South Africa. In this case, a local woman is thought to have 'intimidated the World Bank away from the Bisasar site' where officials hoped to secure carbon reduction credits as a result of burning methane gas produced by a dump site (*ibid*, 1047). This is illustrative of the political power that organised communities are able to offer. While there is an argument to say that low-income countries should not be expected to make substantive contributions to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it is more accurate to say that this is an issue for high consumption households, rather than solely for countries. It is important that governments act to ensure that the lifestyles of the more affluent households (wherever they are located) do not result in continuing and additional emissions of greenhouse gases. Informed organised communities will assist in ensuring that governments take the necessary action, and the involvement of low-income communities in mitigation projects will strengthen their ability to demand reductions in global emissions that will, in turn, reduce the local impacts of climate change.

The role of low-income nations in mitigation is also attracting increased attention in international negotiations. The Maldives is the first country to pledge to become 'zero carbon' (by 2019) and the Vulnerable Countries Forum – a group of eleven countries formed in 2009 – has pledged to reduce emissions as part of its commitment to addressing climate change, despite the member countries having low emissions and great needs for adaptation. As low- and middle-income nations accept the principle of Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs), local areas are also likely to engage increasingly in discussions over locally appropriate responses of this type.

5 CONCLUSION: THE POTENTIAL FOR CBA

In the same way that participation has been viewed as a response to the failures of top-down development models, CBA is often seen as a response to top-down adaptation that fails to engage with the needs of the most vulnerable members of society (Boyd *et al.*, 2009). Within this mode of thinking, CBA has the potential to transform power relations between organised groups of low-income citizens, institutions of governance, funding agencies and

international organisations leading to a more effective, empowering, and holistic strategy for responding to climate change. We argue that, if it is to do this effectively, practitioners and researchers alike need to take heed of the lessons learned from participatory development and related fields of intervention. CBA practitioners need not only to engage with broader agendas that reduce poverty and vulnerability (Sabates-Wheeler *et al.*, 2008), but also to engage with issues of power and governance operating at various scales.

As has been pointed out in relation to participatory development, too much focus on the local scale in participation can underplay both local inequalities and adverse power relations at district/city, national and transnational levels (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Low-income individuals and their families face considerable structural adversity. They have to manage with few financial resources in a social and economic context that is, in urban centres, dominated by money with commodified labour, and goods and service markets.

The willingness of low-income individuals and communities to address climate change mitigation and our discussion of the limitations of some participatory approaches both lead to a broader political point. To be effective in their development aspirations, practitioners of CBA must, we argue, broaden their critical awareness if many of the conceptual flaws of other professionally planned development approaches for low-income groups are to be avoided. Involving poor groups in processes of both mitigation and adaptation can transform the broader political relationships in which they are involved. For this to happen, CBA needs to include tools and methods that enable a more explicit transfer of power to local communities, as otherwise decisions are made by those outside the community who are only partially or not at all accountable to local residents. This necessarily requires an engagement with the state (at multiple levels) and with international development agencies. It will also require innovative financing mechanisms, as the existing funding structures and systems of the official development assistance agencies makes genuine local engagement difficult or impossible. The specific funds mandated under the UNFCCC present additional challenges related to proving that interventions respond to climate change (and not broader vulnerability to climate variability), and therefore may be even less effective in dealing with challenges at the local level (although there is likely to be an explicit CBA window to the UNFCCC mandated Adaptation Fund; see Ayers (2009) for more detail).

A number of more pragmatic recommendations also emerge from this review. One important step may be the opening up of multiple options for securing technical advice enabling low-income groups to equip themselves with the expertise that they require to understand the potential consequences of climate change, the related uncertainties and the ways in which the donor community is responding to the need for adaptation. Greater emphasis on representative organisations of the poor that link low-income and disadvantaged communities may help to deal with the multiple scales of impact and/or intervention. Specific attention should be given to the interface between climate change priorities alongside other immediate development needs, and the heterogeneous needs within low-income households and neighbourhoods.

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