



ACTION ON CLIMATE TODAY

ACT Report

The Institutional Context for Tackling Climate Change
in South Asia: What was new in 2016?

November 2017

www.actiononclimate.today

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This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

The Institutional Context for Tackling Climate Change in South Asia: What was new in 2016?

The institutional context for tackling climate change refers to issues such as the level of institutional capacity, political will, available financial resources etc. These aspects define whether and why tackling climate change is a priority for governments and their ability to define and deliver effective adaptation strategies.

Measuring the institutional context for tackling climate change is important for identifying the opportunities and barriers for effective adaptation in a particular location. It can therefore shape the design of a possible intervention and explain why it has been a success, or not.

This paper highlights some of the changes in the institutional context for tackling climate change which took place in 2016. It is based on the annual context assessment which is carried out as part of the Action on Climate Today (ACT) programme (see Box 1) in Afghanistan, India, Nepal and Pakistan, and at the sub-national level in six states in India (Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Odisha).

The results from this assessment process are location specific, and it is difficult to draw regional conclusions. However, this paper draws out some of the trends in 2016 across the different national and sub-national contexts, as well as highlights where some of the differences lie. It focuses only on changes against the 2016 baseline assessment results.

Box 1: About the Action on Climate Today (ACT) Programme

ACT is a five-year DFID funded regional programme which aims to transform systems of planning and delivery for adaptation to climate change. It is also attracting further climate change investment from the public and private sector. Managed by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), the programme is working with governments in Afghanistan, India, Nepal and Pakistan, and in six states in India (Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Odisha). Some of the activities include linking planning and budgetary frameworks on climate change, developing decision-making support tools, and creating strong systems for transparency, accountability and feedback. In addition the programme is providing technical support to design and deliver targeted climate resilience measures, such as early-warning systems for natural disasters, climate-smart agriculture practices, and urban flood planning.

Box 2: Methodology for Climate Change Context Assessment

Every year the ACT programme team carries out an assessment of the context for tackling climate change in each of the national and sub-national locations. This provides valuable insights about the environment within which the programme operates which informs the design and delivery of the programme's strategy and activities. By repeating the process annually it also monitors broad shifts in the governments' responses to climate change and in some instances highlights the programme's contribution towards this. In each location the process followed a common methodology which is as streamlined and light-touch as possible.

The assessment is primarily qualitative and focused around a Key Informant Discussion of stakeholders from outside government but who work closely with the government on climate change issues. These individuals also produce subjective ratings against some indicators. The opinions gathered from this group are then validated and refined against bilateral discussions with government officials, and third party reports and documentation. The methodology for this assessment is published as a separate document.

This paper presents some of the common trends within each location in 2016 against the key dimensions of the institutional context for tackling the impacts of climate change:

- Availability of accurate and relevant information on climate change and its impact on growth and development;
- Awareness and understanding of key stakeholders on the risk of climate change for growth and development;
- High-level political commitment to tackling climate change;
- Stakeholder participation and influence in the climate change decision-making process;
- Status of the policy framework for tackling climate change;
- Institutional coordination for cross-sectoral action on climate change
- Mainstreaming of climate change in sector development planning
- Budgeting and finance for adaptation

The rest of the paper discusses the results from 2016 for each in turn, providing some examples of whether and how the institutional context has changed in different locations.

Evidence base on climate change

There was no significant change in the quality, availability and uptake of information on climate change across the locations in 2016. It remained a very mixed situation, with pockets of extensive research and a strong culture of evidence-based policy-making (e.g. Maharashtra) while other locations lacked basic analysis on climate change impacts (e.g. Chhattisgarh). However, in 2016, there were efforts to improve the evidence base in some of the most lacking locations. For example, in Afghanistan a number of major new studies on climate change were launched or commissioned. This reflected a new interest by the Government in understanding climate change impacts, particularly in terms of water availability, as well as donors' international commitments to support climate change action.

In the next couple of years there should therefore be major improvements in the quality of the available evidence base in these locations.

In many of the Indian States there was some improvement in the accessibility of available information on climate change. The concept of having a dedicated cell or office responsible for climate change had taken root (see dimension on 'institutional coordination'), and part of their mandate was knowledge management. In 2016, many of these cells started to initiate reforms to collect and put online documents related to climate change. For some states the improvement was modest, for example in Kerala and Maharashtra the State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) was put online, while in Odisha the nodal officer for the first time began to populate the climate change portal with available literature. In Chhattisgarh a dedicated Knowledge Management Cell for Climate Change was established, with financial support from the central Department for Science and Technology.

In a number of locations there was a small shift in the level of uptake of evidence on climate change by the government. There were more requests to experts for information on climate change by officials, usually in connection to a funding proposal for climate finance. In some cases (e.g. Maharashtra, Odisha) there was evidence that sectoral departments were increasingly reaching out to the Climate Change Cell and/or experts for information to assist with mainstreaming. In Afghanistan the Government started investing in monitoring water availability patterns, although this was motivated by their hydrological power expansion plans, and geopolitical negotiations on river sharing.

Awareness and understanding of climate change risks and opportunities

There was no major change in 2016 in the level of awareness and understanding of climate change across stakeholder groups in general in any location. However, in most locations, a larger number of officials from different line ministries began to engage with the issue of climate change, primarily through their involvement in developing climate finance proposals. This experience enhanced their understanding of the impact of climate change on their sector. In some locations there was a change in government, which for Assam meant new ministers with little prior experience or knowledge of climate change, while in Kerala the new party in government was traditionally more pro-environmental, and therefore came with a relatively high level of understanding of climate change.

In addition, a few specific stakeholder groups in some locations were exposed to extreme climate change impacts for the first time and as a result became educated in the subject, for example the tea industry in Assam, the urban population in Kabul in Afghanistan, and the agriculture sector and general public in Kerala. At the national level, the UNFCCC negotiations in Paris at the end of the year put the spotlight on climate change for political leaders and bureaucrats, although also introduced new subjects such as 'loss and damage' which was not well understood even by experts.

Political commitment to tackling climate change

There was some change in the level of political commitment to tackling climate change in 2016 in some locations, however in general a concern for climate change still cannot

compete with political priorities in the decision-making process. The only location where there was some noticeable change was Afghanistan, which started with very low levels of high-level political commitment. In 2016 politicians and senior bureaucrats began to regularly mention climate change within speeches and policy documents. It was for the first time included in the National Development Framework, and some ministers initiated action on climate change within their sectors (e.g. agriculture, energy, water and finance). This reflected the outlook of a new set of political leaders, and advisors within the President's office, who were more development focused and more aware of the issue, who in 2016 settled into their posts and became influential. Political leaders recognised that Afghanistan was highly vulnerable to climate change, and unlike other political and social problems the country faced, it had in no way contributed to the problem. It was therefore seen as a valid justification for accessing international aid.

The lead up to the Paris Conference of the UNFCCC kept the issue of climate change on the political agenda, although mainly through a mitigation lens. In Pakistan, the Prime Minister received such a negative response from civil society to it's INDC that he has made several attempts to demonstrate his commitment to climate change, such as appointing a focal person within his office. In some locations the impact of climate change was felt for the first time, or particularly severely. For example, in Afghanistan Kabul experienced a very delayed winter which caused a lot of public concern and media coverage, encouraging politicians to discuss the issue. In Kerala, there was for the first time a major drought and water scarcity, which similarly put the issue on the political agenda. Kerala also experienced a change in government, and a traditionally more environmental party came into office, although it was too early to judge whether there was any substantive shift in commitment.

Case Study of a high performing location

In Pakistan there was evidence of some increase in the levels of political commitment at the federal as well as provincial level with the Prime Minister taking more direct interest in the issue. The Prime Minister's Secretariat appointed a designated Prime Minister's Focal Point on Climate Change, which increased the uptake of climate change issues within Prime Minister's office. The focal point (appointed with the support from ACT) acts as a bridge between the Secretariat and the Ministry of Climate Change and helps build high-level momentum on climate change. The Prime Minister also launched a reforestation programme 'Green Pakistan Programme' showcasing environmental concerns as a priority area for Pakistan. At the provincial level, in Punjab, the Lahore High Court ruled that the provincial government needed to do more to tackle climate change, and implement the National Climate Policy. This ruling has proven to be very influential in focusing the government's attention on the issue.

Participation and influence over decisions on adaptation to climate change

There was no noticeable significant change in 2016 in the patterns of who participates in and is influential over decisions related to climate change. There was some evidence in some locations that civil society was more vocal on climate change issues, and were interacting with government more on the issue. NGOs were increasingly getting resources to work on climate change through climate funds and/or were trying to access these resources by being visible on the subject. In some locations there was evidence that

government is opening up decision-making (or at least discussions) related to climate change to civil society, either by institutionalising consultation in general (e.g. Maharashtra) or reconvening the Climate Change Committee and inviting non-government actors (e.g. Bihar).

Policy framework for tackling climate change

With the exception of Afghanistan, there was no major change to the policy framework on adaptation in any location in 2016. Afghanistan joined the rest of the locations in adopting a cross-sectoral climate change strategy and action plan. However, the Afghanistan document shares the same weaknesses as those from the other locations, in terms of being very broad and not ‘implementation-ready’, and having low levels of ownership by the line departments. The INDCs were formally adopted by each national government, although none of them commit to anything new on adaptation. In some locations a review or refinement of the policy framework was initiated (e.g. Odisha, Kerala) which should result in an improvement next year. The process of preparing the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) continued at the national level in each country, although it remains unclear how these will fit within and strengthen the existing policy documents.

It was still very difficult to judge the level of implementation of the policy framework as none of the governments published a report on implementation in 2016. There continued to be evidence of mainstreaming climate change within sectoral development policy and action, but this was difficult to attribute to the policy framework. In some locations (e.g. Assam), there was an increase in attention on the policy framework, and greater engagement by sectoral departments, which could have contributed to increased activity by these departments. There was some interest emerging in improving accountability on implementing the policy framework. For example, in Kerala a review of the plan was initiated which included a stocktake of implementation. In Odisha the Government expressed interest in improving their methodology for their progress reporting, to include evaluating the impact of activities. There was also an emerging interest in reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which could be a future opportunity to increasing accountability on climate change expenditure.

Institutional coordination for cross-sectoral action on climate change

There were significant improvements across many of the locations in 2016 on the institutional set-up for supporting mainstreaming across sectors. At the national level, in Afghanistan, the Government launched the process of establishing a Climate Finance Unit. In Pakistan, the newly appointed Prime Minister’s Focal Person on Climate Change gave high-level backing to the work of the Ministry of Climate Change. Across India, State nodal officers showed some evidence of enhanced capacity and a greater proactiveness in working with the line departments. For example, in Assam the newly created Assam Climate Change Management Society (ACCMS) became operational and the Government allocated a staff member to ensure its sustainability. In most cases, the formal coordination committee of different line departments continued to not play a significant role, although in Kerala and Maharashtra it met more frequently than previously. In a number of locations there was evidence of an increased number of ad-hoc stakeholder consultations organised by the government and other actors to discuss specific issues such as climate finance proposals and

urgent policy documents. For example, in Nepal, institutional coordination between departments increased due to the NAP process.

Mainstreaming of climate change in sector development planning

The opportunity to access climate finance continued to motivate some sectoral ministries and departments across all the locations in 2016 to engage with the issue of adaptation, and develop funding proposals that mainstreamed climate change into their ongoing work. In some locations, there was some evidence that the cross-sectoral climate change plan was also an enabling factor. For example, in Maharashtra, a prioritised list of SAPCC actions was adopted which gave line ministries a much clearer idea of their responsibilities. In other locations, efforts were made to identify the adaptation co-benefit of different development programmes across climate sensitive sectors. In a few locations, there was early interest to link the cross-sectoral climate change policy framework to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, in Chhattisgarh, there was increasing recognition and use of the SAPCC to frame the state's SDG Vision 2030 document. However, without any formal monitoring of climate change actions and expenditure, it remains difficult to assess the degree of mainstreaming.

Budgeting and finance for adaptation

All locations continued to focus on accessing external sources of climate finance in 2016, with some significant successes in terms of receiving Green Climate Fund (GCF) funding, and disbursement of the National Adaptation Fund (NAF) in India. Across all locations, there was a massive rise in interest for accessing climate finance, and increasing awareness on the sources and possibilities. This is because climate finance was still being viewed as a flexible source of funding with a potential to also supplement development priorities. The interest in accessing climate finance provided an entry-point for encouraging the governments to integrate climate finance in their budgeting systems, and was the catalyst in some instances for strengthening the institutional arrangements for accessing and managing climate change funding. In a number of locations, there was evidence of an increase in interest and understanding around climate budgeting. For example, in Afghanistan, the positive momentum generated around the opportunity of accessing climate finance motivated the Ministry of Finance to include climate budgeting within their work plan, and request for a new climate change expert in their team. In Odisha, climate change was mentioned for the first time in the state's budget speech for 2016. In Kerala, the Additional Chief Secretary took personal interest in the subject and committed to taking on the initiative himself. However, in these and other locations, time and capacity constraints meant that this promising level of initial interest, had yet to materialise into concrete actions.

Case Study of a high performing location

Odisha scored highly in terms of accessing and mainstreaming climate finance in planning and budgeting. In March 2016, the government's spending on climate change was mentioned for the first time in the state budget speech. Success in accessing climate funds such as GCF and NAF also spiked interest within the line departments due to the immediate finance it provides for implementing climate actions. The Climate Change Cell was also exploring sources of private sector CSR money for spending on climate change

and environmental issues. As a result of other ongoing donor programmes in Odisha, the government was also exploring the potential of funds from development programmes such as MGNREGA for funding adaptation activities.

Summary of changes in the context in different locations in 2016

This summary chart provides a simplified summary of the trend across each direction, across each location. It does not however reflect the actual status (i.e. how strong the location rates for the dimension), just whether there has been any changes in the context for tackling climate change over the last year.

	Evidence base	Awareness and understanding	Political commitment	Stakeholder participation and influence	Policy Framework	Institutional capacity for mainstreaming
Afghanistan	→	→	↑	→	↑	↑
Nepal	→	→	→	↑	→	→
Pakistan	→	→	↑	↑	→	↑
Assam	→	→	→	→	→	→
Bihar	→	→	→	→	↑	→
Chhattisgarh	↑	↑	→	→	→	→
Kerala	→	→	→	→	↑	↑
Maharashtra	→	→	→	→	↑	↑
Odisha	→	→	→	→	→	→



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