

SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

Emotions as an Element in Project Implementation for Climate Change Adaptation

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The Policy and Practice Challenge

Given how important community-initiated projects are to people's wellbeing in Latin America and the Caribbean, why do so many of these projects fail or fizzle out? Where lack of sustained inputs by residents or other stakeholders is a factor, how can momentum be repaired? Research by ADAPTO in 22 small-scale initiatives suggests that social, cultural, and emotional aspects of the microprojects played an important role in successful project implementation. 8 out of the 22 microprojects encountered difficulties in implementation which meant that the projects lost momentum. By reflecting on the success of certain ADAPTO projects and the frustrations encountered in others, this policy brief aims to explore why sustaining momentum during project implementation is important. It also aims to address why momentum stalls and what can be done by collaborating parties to overcome setbacks.

Cultivating positive emotions sparks activism, collective action, and helps to create compelling visions to produce lasting change in informal settings*. However, increased negative emotions associated with project implementation can also disrupt momentum which can be detrimental to project implementation. Sustaining momentum in project implementation requires both the reinforcement of positive emotions through recreational activities, as well as the mobilization of negative emotions into collective action. Building momentum also requires consistent action by stakeholders and governmental actors to tackle underlying issues of climate change, such as environmental injustices. In addition, stakeholders must seek to balance involvement by allowing residents autonomy and power over the project implementation process.

* Informal settings, for ADAPTO, refers to the time, places, and circumstances in which people use their own initiative—outside or in parallel to institutionalized procedures and standards—to respond to local conditions, secure access to shelter, livelihoods, or services, and improve their general wellbeing in the face of hostile conditions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Emotions are a catalysing force in climate change adaptation projects. Placing emotions at the centre of our work can sustain project advancement and reveal risks — of social stigma, inequalities, and differing priorities — that can undermine initiatives.
- Collective action, social exchanges, and recreational activities can be intertwined to create positive emotions and project momentum.
- Momentum can be interrupted when facing bureaucratic hurdles, financial uncertainty, and when miscommunication occurs between collaborators.

Building Momentum in Climate Change Adaptation Initiatives

ADAPTO research indicates that there are three key aspects to building momentum in climate change adaptation initiatives. These include: (i) finding innovative and creative ways to spark the interest of the community (ii) making workshops accessible to all and (iii) fostering commitments across multiple levels — stakeholders, policy makers, local leaders, residents, and governments. The “*I Adapt*” and “*Let’s Manage Risk*” projects are successful examples of this.



Photo: Gonzalo González/ADAPTO - Cuba

I ADAPT, Carahatas, Cuba

The “*I Adapt*” project focused on educating future generations on climate change risks. Here ADAPTO tested the hypothesis that incorporating children in the process could help to spread awareness throughout the community. This hypothesis was validated in the project, as children spoke more frequently with their families about climate change related topics after engaging in recreational and artistic activities. Emotions played a central role as more women were involved in this project upon seeing how issues of climate change could affect their children. The project successfully raised awareness among 98 family members who were involved in the children’s activities. “*I Adapt*” managed to go beyond the school setting and gained positive community recognition.



Photo: Cristian Gutiérrez/ADAPTO-Colombia

Let’s Manage Risk, Salgar, Colombia

The “*Let’s Manage Risk*” project focused on training local leaders in risk management. It successfully created a network working on risk reduction in Salgar, despite encountering hurdles during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The principal motivation behind the success of the project was the passion, enthusiasm, and dedication of the community leader. She generated community interest through engaging with a wide range of actors within the community, including members of retirement homes, religious organizations, and members of the Municipal council.

The generation of positive emotions through recreational activities, such as pride and a strong sense of community, coupled with negative emotions, such as anxiety about climate related disasters, enabled the projects to successfully begin working in the affected communities. ADAPTO research shows that both children and trained local leaders were effective at utilizing these emotions for mobilizing community action.

Losing Momentum: Struggles and Challenges

In spite of the successes, ADAPTO researchers also faced struggles and challenges in project implementation in Chile, Colombia, and Cuba. These struggles resulted in momentum being lost at certain points of the projects.



Photo: ADAPTO-Yumbo, Colombia

Struggle 1: Power Dynamics and Collaboration

Across ADAPTO projects, navigating power dynamics in teams of residents, local leaders, policy makers, researchers, and governmental actors has been a struggle. Researchers and university actors have at times overpowered residents and local leaders. Governmental bodies and policy makers have also committed this error. This can result in a breakdown of trust between residents, local leaders, and collaborative forces such as researchers and policy makers. This negatively affects project momentum and residents' passion for project implementation. If residents are continuously let down by collaborators, at best, residents' passion for the project decreases, and, at worst, residents may lose interest in participating in the project at all. Projects have also been affected by financial concerns. Many ADAPTO projects require consistent funding and anxieties about whether this funding will be secured often results in lost momentum. No collaborators want to put all their efforts into a project only for financial support to be later withdrawn.

Struggle 2: Miscommunication Amongst Collaborators

Miscommunication arose in several ADAPTO projects, particularly those without clear communication channels between all actors. When project members and collaborators fail to meet and engage with one another on a regular basis, this can result in the risk of miscommunication amongst collaborators. Miscommunication can also occur if collaborators are unwilling to engage with the concerns of local leaders and residents. Over time, miscommunication of this kind can result in the breakdown of a project and the erosion of intragroup trust. Miscommunication can also result in an array of negative emotions, which, unless channelled into collective action, can result in feelings of intragroup resentment.

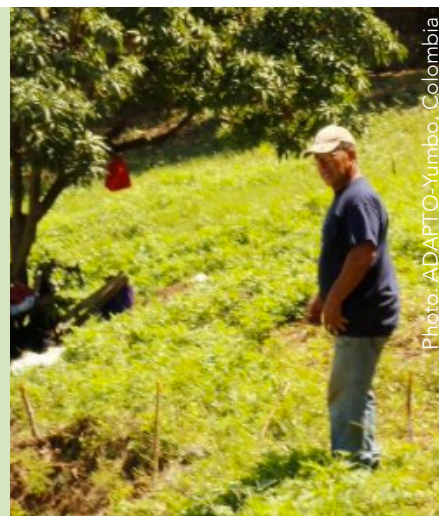


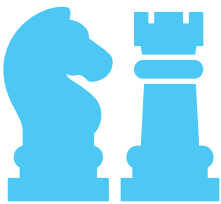
Photo: ADAPTO-Yumbo, Colombia

Sustaining Momentum: The Lessons

Emotions can influence project momentum in both a positive way and a negative way. Positive emotions can be generated through recreational activities in communities and through excellent leadership. But negative emotions can arise within all collaborations at certain stages. Research by ADAPTO suggests that in order to sustain momentum we cannot simply ignore the bad and praise the good.



Effective communication channels must be set up in order to sustain momentum and these channels must make room for the expression of both positive and negative emotions. If negative emotions are not expressed, and, more importantly, heard by collaborators, this can result in project momentum dissolving altogether.



Roles must be clearly defined and boundaries set for all collaborators before projects begin. These roles and boundaries can evolve over time, but roles and boundaries need to be communicated early in the project implementation process in order to decrease opportunities for miscommunication to occur amongst collaborators.



Even in successful projects with passionate leaders, momentum will naturally ebb and flow. This ought not to be a point of concern. However, collaborators need to pay attention to the 'low' points in momentum, in order to minimize factors which could cause cessation of the project and withdrawal of interest by community members.

Emotions and Project Implementation

Emotions play a crucial role in ensuring that projects gain momentum in the beginning of implementation and that momentum is sustained throughout the project. In order to sustain momentum during project implementation, ADAPTO research suggests that collaborators need to work on creating healthy channels for effective communication of both positive and negative emotions, set up clear roles and boundaries from the onset, and be prepared for momentum to ebb and flow throughout project implementation. In order to avoid emotions having a negative impact on momentum, collaborators need to work together to find solutions for financial insecurity, issues of unhealthy power dynamics, and miscommunication.



ADAPTO is a multidisciplinary research project funded by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and coordinated by the Disaster Resilience and Sustainable Reconstruction Research Alliance ([Euvre Durable](#)) from 2017-2021. It investigates climate change adaptation in informal settings in understanding and reinforcing bottom-up initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean. For more information, see: http://www.grif.umontreal.ca/acciones/en_index.html

Resources

- › ADAPTO, Artefacts of Disaster Risk Reduction, Community-based initiatives to face climate change in Latin America and the Caribbean, "What We Learned" (<https://artefacts.umontreal.ca/what-we-learned/>)