Who are the Stakeholders and What are their Roles?
Collaborative Climate Action in Informal Settings

An ADAPTO Policy & Practice Brief authored by Sayana Sherif, Talha Awan, Camila Flórez Bossio, Em Walsh, Tapan Dhar & Lisa Bornstein. July, 2021

The Policy and Practice Challenge

Climate change adaptation and disaster risk mitigation usually involves many actors. Such multi-stakeholder initiatives are often complicated by the numerous interests at play. In informal settings[1], mistrust between locals and other stakeholders, local resistance to change, and dynamics around external involvement may impede joint work. Sensitive dynamics may arise due to differences among residents (social, educational, linguistic, etc.); imbalances in knowledge, power, and expertise among stakeholders; lack of appropriate frameworks for involvement of government and other external actors; and, in many cases, a history of discrimination towards informal residents. Yet such projects also bring together established and novel stakeholders in new ways, with the potential to create pathways to risk-reducing adaptation. How can multi-stakeholder involvement best be undertaken so as to improve the safety and well-being of at-risk people in informal settings?

ADAPTO's research in informal settings — conducted in Colombia, Chile, Cuba, and Haiti between 2017 and 2021 — provides some answers. In 22 local initiatives, residents, community-based organizations, university researchers, national and local governments, and other public and private entities worked together to document and advance risk-reducing adaptation. The initiatives required stakeholders to work in tandem, often with overlaps in roles and responsibilities. Sometimes such overlaps led to productive collaboration. For instance, successes included reductions in various threats, from violence to food insecurity and flooding. In other instances, uncertainty about roles sparked conflict, impeding implementation. In such cases, clarifying and reconciling stakeholder roles led to smoother operations, shorter project turn-around times, efficient project execution, and better opportunities for respectful, productive connections between residents and external actors.

To assist multi-stakeholder initiatives, this brief highlights lessons learnt from the collaborative ADAPTO initiatives. The brief covers: **(1) who were the stakeholders, and what were their roles, (2) how were differences and conflicts reconciled, and (3) how were projects made mutually beneficial?**

[1] 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

- Adaptation practices in informal settings are multi-actor efforts. Novel and established actors may be involved, necessitating new ways of working together.

- Early identification of stakeholder roles and responsibilities can build trust, improve project quality, and prevent project delays.

- Successful initiatives are those that are:
  - Welcomed by residents and grounded in their perceptions, experiences, and practices
  - Supportive of leadership by local women
  - Facilitated by academics, NGOs, and CBOs that provide expertise, foster trust among stakeholders, and address conflict constructively
  - Supported by partner- and government-established spaces for transparent, respectful dialogue

The Various Stakeholders and Their Roles in Climate Action

Many stakeholders involved in the ADAPTO initiatives are familiar, such as residents, community-based organizations, local government, and international funders. But less-recognized actors, both within and beyond these stakeholder groups, were also important to moving initiatives forward. Among neighborhood residents, women were lead participants in initiatives in Yumbo, Colombia (see box below). Small enterprise owners were important to initiatives in Colombia and Chile. At many stages of the initiatives, university faculty and students worked hand-in-hand with residents and other stakeholders, assisting in, for example, initial stages (e.g., needs, project ideas), detailed planning, implementation, or assessment. Depending on the initiative, stakeholder mix, and specific task, different stakeholders took on leadership, supporting, and follow-up roles (see Figure 1).

Stakeholders	Project phases								
	Recognition of needs	First idea / concept	Preliminary planning	Detailed planning	Approval	Hiring / Assignment	Construction / Execution	Maintenance / Operation	Replicability / Impact
Neighborhood residents									
Community-based organizations									
Universities									
Local governments									
National governments									
Other public & private organizations									

Legend: Leadership role — Support role — Follow-up role — No role
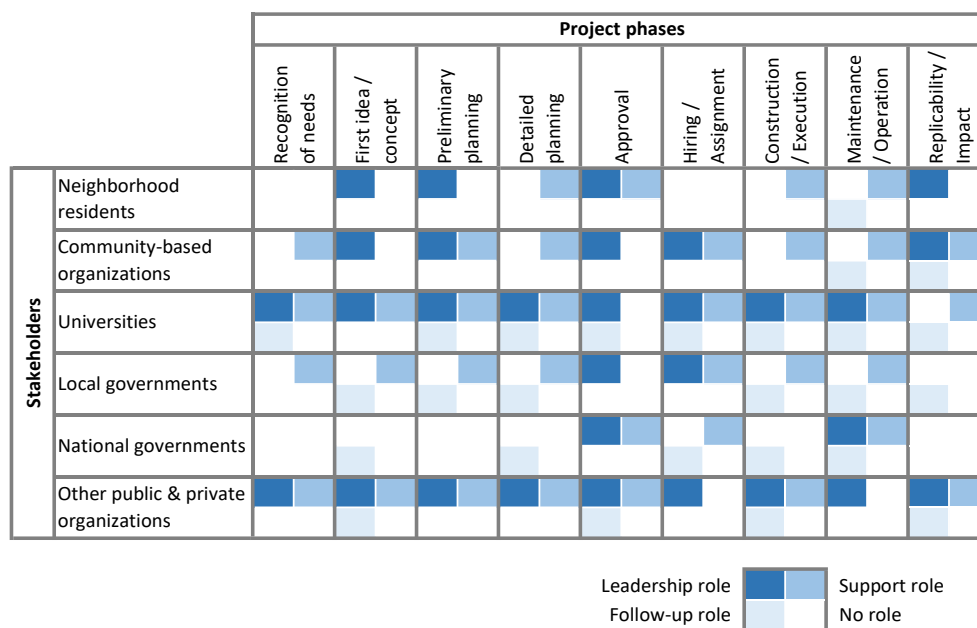
Figure 1. Stakeholders' roles as observed across ADAPTO micro-projects

Neighborhood residents are primary actors in climate change adaptation practices. They are the ones most affected by climate change risks and, subsequently, by adaptation interventions. Residents are central to the success or failure of adaptation and mitigation measures. While measures need to be technically sound, they also need to be embraced by those impacted the most. In ADAPTO, two approaches were taken to identifying initiatives: (a) joint development by a partnership of university researchers and residents; and (b) bottom-up proposals by residents. In both cases, ADAPTO interventions drew on the lived experience of residents, and their deep understanding of their locale, ecosystem, and socio-cultural practices, to define small-scale projects that would be welcomed and impactful. Residents served as a primary human resource before, during, and after project implementation. Among those jointly developed, a couple initiatives focused on children, seniors, and/or migrants — groups less likely to wield power openly in the neighborhood. More generally, participants were predominantly women. While their participation was linked to the success of initiatives, in some communities they were not accorded the same credibility and support as their male counterparts; supporting the role of women in climate adaptation is a building block for successful initiatives.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) and **Non-governmental organizations** (NGOs) provide tools to balance technical and social work by capturing and incorporating community perspectives in the project. Local CBOs often have long-standing relations with residents, community leaders, and local politicians that allow them to transcend barriers of mistrust. NGOs with expertise in participatory processes and project management can play a crucial role in bringing together the interests of local and non-local stakeholders. In ADAPTO, CBOs and NGOs helped with effective implementation of participatory activities. In Carahatas, Cuba, local CBO Mujeres del Mar incorporated climate change

education into an annual festival while social media-based Voces de Carahatas established a forum to exchange information on climate change effects and solutions to ongoing problems. As local organizations, the members were in touch with the experiences and mindsets of other residents. Inclusion of Antioquia Presente, a Colombian NGO, as a core member of the ADAPTO team permitted training of local leaders, backstopping of initiatives, and common use of participatory approaches across the 22 initiatives (see box below).

Universities and **academics** often engage in community-based projects. As in ADAPTO, they may have prior experience manoeuvring multi-actor undertakings, be eligible to apply for community-engaged funding and, when successful, are involved in all stages of the project, whether in lead, supporting or follow-up roles. ADAPTO includes nine universities from Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Haiti, and Canada, with university teams comprised of students, professors, and other staff. Academics involved in ADAPTO are well-versed in pedagogy, research, management, giving voice to others, counselling, consulting, mediation and more. They have up-to-date knowledge of relevant research that can bolster project undertakings. Importantly, ADAPTO academics in Cuba, Chile, and Colombia have established medium-to-long term relationships with partners and created opportunities for structured dialogue among them. For instance, in Nonguén, Chile, the university helped representatives of State institutions, private companies, and rural communities form a collaborative alliance on infrastructure policies. Universities also benefit from such community initiatives, which serve as avenues to learn, and train students, about local conditions, community-based adaptation, and risk reduction dynamics.

Local governments and officials have the power to represent residents and generate political momentum for interventions by liaising between localities and higher authorities. Officials set out guidelines for urban development and (dis)approve construction, water and electricity connections, and disbursement of public funds for many services. Yet many local officials and staff have complex relationships with informal workers and settlements. They may, for instance, have tried to eradicate or police them as non-conforming to laws and norms. Or they may have provided essential services and routes to regularization. Individual officials may also count themselves as residents of the locale. In ADAPTO, local government actors were largely absent in some initiatives, with a role limited to processing permit requests (for instance, for the Festival del Mar) or receiving publicized information on results. In other cases, their involvement was integral to the initiative, or, as occurred where ADAPTO contributed to Municipal Climate Change Adaptation Plans in Yumbo, influenced the design or implementation of public policies.

Photo: ADAPTO-Chile

Photo: ADAPTO-Cuba

Photo: ADAPTO-Chile

National governments often have framing, supporting, or follow-up roles in adaptation and mitigation. They, with their local counterparts, formulate and execute policies. In local projects, national government actors may have a role in approving permits, budgets, and projects, especially where lands are federally owned, projects have potential political impact, or international funds flow through official ministries. In such cases, national bodies work to ensure that supported initiatives align with local, national, and even international goals. This may mean helping to move the initiatives forward, e.g., by providing funding, sanctioning use of land, or publicizing successes, and formalizing initiatives under larger community programs, policy changes, or national/international recognition through replication elsewhere. ADAPTO's Barrio Bellavista vertical community garden project in Tomé benefitted from supervision and training programs of the Chilean Ministry of Housing and Urbanism who formalized the initiative under the Quiero Mi Barrio (QMB) program; the QMB sustained municipal involvement until the end of QMB's contractual relationship with the neighborhood.

Other public and private organizations are essential providers of resources critical for climate adaptation efforts like those conducted by ADAPTO. They bring to the table both technical and non-technical expertise such as engineering skills, project management experience, legal knowledge, and financial support. For example, in the ADAPTO led project "Harvesting Stormwater: low-cost water channels and tanks" in Yumbo, Colombia, organizations like Ecodeck and Cementos Argos donated permeable pavers and bags of cement; the international organization International Development Research Centre (IDRC) served as integral participants in ADAPTO projects by contributing financially, influencing disaster risk reduction (DRR) policymaking, and more. Such organizations are generally leading and/or supporting actors throughout all phases of the project(s). In some cases, these organizations largely play a follow-up role during the planning and approval stages.

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Place-Making and Place-Protecting: Establishing a Community Park in Yumbo, Colombia

This initiative involved piloting a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS), which substituted as urban furniture in a newly developed park in the Las Américas neighbourhood of La Estancia. For the realization of the park, the local university—**Universidad del Valle**—held 26 participatory workshops where community members agreed on the need for a collective space. The interventions focused on the funding and creation of the park. It was agreed upon that to support the project there would need to be a collaboration between community, private and public actors, in order to make the process more cost efficient.

The University worked with a local action committee in the Las Américas neighbourhood to generate ideas, conduct needs assessments, and consolidate a project proposal. Several actors from the community provided contacts, resources, and spaces necessary for the initial development of the project. Women from the **community** provided the university access to information on previous studies and projects in the area, while helping establish contacts with key actors.

The land needed for the realization of the park and piloting of the SUDS was donated by **Cementos Argos, a private company**, to the municipality overseeing the Las Américas neighbourhood. Women from the local community played a fundamental role in facilitating the legal process of registering the land with the municipality. In addition to donating the land, Cementos Argos also provided cement.

Meanwhile, **Alianza Empresarial** (business alliance) a **non-profit organization**, paid for other construction materials and, later, contributed to the financing of recreational activities and workshops.

These actors worked with the **local government** who authorized the construction of the infrastructure and the use of specialized heavy machinery and skilled workers from the municipality.

Antioquia Presente, a non-governmental organization that specializes in community empowerment, resolved several challenges allowing the construction of the park to begin. Their participation at the initial stage was fundamental, as they developed a stakeholder table exercise in which participants—including community members, academics, public and private organizations, and government—recognized their roles, responsibilities, and commitments regarding the project. They facilitated management workshops and worktables to address problems caused by lack of communication.

Photo: ADAPTO-Colombia

Tackling Conflicts: Reconciling Differences and Recognizing Learning Opportunities

Conflicting goals and opinions among stakeholders were an issue that arose in many ADAPTO micro-projects. The multiple actors almost inevitably have different views as to how to approach the project, how and how much to intervene, and, among others, what responsibilities each stakeholder should shoulder. When non-local actors engage in local efforts, divergences in viewpoints may relate to different lived-experiences and understandings of the problem. ADAPTO's micro-projects revealed that while climate experts, international partners, governments, and other non-local actors view climate risk in terms of long-term impacts (e.g., sea-level rise, increased precipitation, global warming), local leaders and residents tend to focus more on daily struggles like water scarcity, food insecurity, and economic slumps. If there are potential political consequences, like winning or losing support close to an election, actors' efforts may become politically motivated, which can be detrimental to the success of the project, leading to project delays, budget overruns, soured relations and even incompletion of the project. The causes and consequences are more pronounced in informal settings where gaps in knowledge, power, and expertise are wider, and where government may have highly complex relations with those in informal settings: demolishing informal settlements, enforcing regulations or, alternatively, providing services and routes to regularization of tenure. It was crucial to the ADAPTO team to partner with universities and other organizations that were politically neutral, i.e., not associated with political parties. This was done so as to (a) maintain ideological and scientific independence, uninfluenced by economic and political interests, (b) establish greater trust between academics, residents and local leaders, and (c) create respectful relations between government, business, and informally situated residents around joint initiatives.

ADAPTO teams, to forge these relations, worked with both non-profit organizations and government institutions to create scenarios of structured conversation, build a culture of joint, inclusive work, and identify ways to overcome implementation barriers. Professors in Cuba, Chile, and Colombia maintained communication with officers in municipal and national urban planning agencies. Alliances, such as that between academic partners and the Laboratorio de Gobierno Local para la Región del Bío-Bío and the Departamento de Medio Ambiente in Concepción, made it possible for ADAPTO initiatives to influence municipal policies and strategies. In Yumbo, such alliances meant that ADAPTO partners could design and execute interventions in the public spaces of informal settings and could implement training programs financed by the local government and local companies. New relationships among stakeholders can scale-up project benefits. For example, with the assistance of ADAPTO and other actors, the local method of DIY/informal housing construction in Carahatas, Cuba was developed upon and legitimized; governments and actors in other locales have shown interest in replicating this model after learning of it. This would not have been possible without active sharing of knowledge at different project stages.

Alliances can be usefully formalized via a collectively signed document that details the project approach, guiding principles, goals ranked in order of priority, conflict resolution, etc. This agreement can be used to reconcile differences and ensure the successful and timely completion of the intervention. Written agreements that are legally binding hold actors responsible and accountable in fulfilling their role(s). The dangers of informal agreements are evident in ADAPTO's vertical garden micro-project in Concepción, Chile, where municipal actors failed to provide the verbally promised water for the gardens. A primary funder/initiator of such projects, or even non-profit organizations who are committed to supporting the initiative across all project phases, may take the lead in drafting such an agreement.

Such experiences suggest that adaptation efforts need to be approached carefully and conscientiously. We found that initiatives, by sharing viewpoints, openly discussing challenges and solutions, and recognizing a variety of positive outcomes, were more likely to succeed. Open communication to cultivate transparency and trust, centring residents' needs, recognizing learning and sharing knowledge, and effective collaboration were priorities. Structured conversation, formalization of agreements, new forms of collaboration, and active attention to conflict can assist multi-stakeholder initiatives to produce benefits locally and beyond.

Photo: ADAPTO-Cuba

Collaboration is Key to Climate Action

Climate change adaptation and disaster risk management efforts are multi-actor undertakings. ADAPTO's micro projects in informal settings uncovered that roles and responsibilities of stakeholders can vary across projects and project stages and are thus not often clearly outlined. Identifying stakeholders, their capacities and their roles in the early stages of a project can help improve the quality and efficacy of adaptation initiatives. Sensitive and effective collaboration on initiatives grounded in local knowledge, ideas and practices, along with targeted conflict resolution when needed, can ensure more productive stakeholder engagement leading to project success. Creating clarity regarding the actions expected of each stakeholder, and holding them accountable for it, can be instrumental in maximizing involvement and output.

Oftentimes in informal settings, necessary technical expertise may either be lacking or concentrated amongst one or few individual(s). For example, ADAPTO micro-project of dome construction in Valle Nonguén, Chile had only one dome-construction specialist engaged in the project, who relocated his place of residence midway thus leaving the project incomplete. Therefore, it is necessary to identify and engage more than one resource, and undertake capacity-development activities to equip residents with skills that ensure sustained adaptation capacity through collaborative action.

Good collaboration can benefit all actors. Residents and local organizations benefit directly from the project through building resilience against climate disasters, financial gains/savings, capacity/skills building, self-organization and empowerment, and more. Through ADAPTO, academics learnt more about local knowledge, place attachment, political sensitivities and scenarios, project management, and impacts of climate change. Collaborative action also allows companies and other organizations to meet their community outreach goals, build local connections and establish a community presence. Governments were involved to varying degrees in each ADAPTO project; greater involvement and successful project implementation helped governments gain legitimacy as, actors in local development.

The ADAPTO initiatives, as multi-stakeholder approaches to climate adaptation, rested on complementary and overlapping roles and responsibilities. Early attention to clarifying such roles, establishing respectful forms of engagement, and resolving conflicts facilitates project implementation. Successful initiatives were grounded in local knowledge, supportive of women leaders, and welcomed by residents. The role of academics and NGOs was crucial to fostering positive forms of interaction among stakeholders and addressing conflict constructively. The spaces that they and government established for dialogue created opportunities for better policy development at a local and national scale. Internationally funded projects like ADAPTO with diverse stakeholders have a high potential to inspire other local initiatives and serve as guiding models.