

Case Study 1



Clockwise: A project beneficiary from a climate resilient agriculture project in the Mamanyoha village, Mopani District (Photo: SANBI); Heat and drought tolerant climate-resilient livestock that were introduced in the Leliefontein and Kamiesberg communities, Namakwa District (Photo: SANBI); An established climate-smart communal garden in the Mamanyoha Village has introduced drip irrigation techniques to irrigate agricultural produce, Mopani District (Photo: SANBI).

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Above left: A "Safety-at Sea" installation in Hondeklipbaai that provides an off-shore tracking system for fishers, Namakwa District (Photo: SANBI);

Above right: A rainwater tank that forms part of a domestic rainwater harvesting system for addressing water security challenges in the Ga-Ntata village, Mopani District (Photo: SANBI).



Key Messages

Seeking to use climate finance as the leverage mechanism to enable local responses to climate change entails the creation and continuous improvement of a new approach to community engagement and project management. Learnings from the Community Adaptation Small Grants Facility (CA SGF) project reveal that this new approach entails, amongst other things:

- A balance between robust and agile systems to facilitate effective oversight alongside the delivery of responsive action to local needs.
- A decision-making authority that is devolved as close to local implementation as possible, given there is a natural tension between practical delivery needs and the requirement of programme governance. The levels of authority may vary in accordance with the theme and may be adjusted throughout the project life cycle depending on needs.
- Project governance structures that identify and develop linkages between local projects, regional adaptation measures and policy for broad impact.
- Flexibility to support local entities to identify and implement practical solutions. Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation projects seek to promote community resilience, requiring context-specific solutions to address local problems. A focus on managing delivery through cascading levels of authority can detract from this strategic objective.
- A clear understanding and definition of the multiple capacities required for Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation. A clear assessment of capacity gaps can inform capacity-building efforts and should be deployed strategically throughout the project life cycle for optimal efficiency and effectiveness.
- Adaptive management practices applied throughout implementation. The needs to which management systems must be responsive will vary depending on contextual factors and the phase of the project life cycle. Achieving measurable programmatic advances at scale requires the effective management of this dynamic interaction between context and aspiration.

Project Overview

The “Taking Adaptation to the Ground: A Small Grants Facility for enabling local level responses to climate change” project (known as the Community Adaptation Small Grants Facility project) was funded by the Adaptation Fund in 2014. The project sought to pilot a new mechanism of Enhanced Direct Access for local level climate change adaptation in South Africa, with a broad goal of understanding how such a mechanism could be scaled and replicated in the future.

The objective of the project was to increase resilience and reduce the vulnerability of local communities who are most vulnerable to climate change through building capacity and empowering these communities to identify and implement adaptation measures. It aimed to facilitate the inclusion of climate change adaptation responses into local practices so that assets and livelihoods would be protected from local climate-induced risks associated with expected dry spells and droughts, seasonal shifts and storm-related disaster events. The emphasis was to support projects that harnessed local knowledge and creativity, integrated climate science, addressed gender disparities and ultimately generated tangible adaptation responses.

The Community Adaptation Small Grants Facility project targeted vulnerable, rural communities in the Namakwa District in the Northern Cape and the Mopani District in Limpopo, South Africa. The project offered grant sizes of approximately US\$100 000 to communities for the implementation of tangible climate change adaptation responses that were identified locally. The project was approved as a four-year pilot project but was extended to over five years to accommodate unforeseen delays.

Creating an Enabling Environment

The poor are among those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. An enabling environment for Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation requires an equitable and inclusive approach to climate change adaptation that includes both top-down and bottom-up interventions. It further requires the implementation of sustainable solutions that are grounded in climate science and yield tangible adaptation outcomes. Resources, in terms of time, money and expertise, are limited, necessitating efficiency and scaling up of successful interventions. In essence, transformative change is required.

Lessons learned from the CA SGF project identified that scaling up mechanisms should facilitate an enabling environment through the development of increasingly effective and capable systems and structures for delivering climate finance. The goal is not necessarily to scale up local interventions that address specific climate change challenges within each socio-political and cultural context. The aspiration is rather to upscale the capacity of oversight and governance structures to enable systems that are

robust enough to support progress and manage risk, yet flexible enough to facilitate locally-driven adaptation interventions. ‘Cookie-cutter’ approaches to Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation will not be effective; a systemic approach to enhance the capacity of the systems involved to deliver responsive support services is key.

Part of the requisite capacity and inherent need for flexibility is adjusting to the needs of the project as they change through time, with regards to both the Small Grants Facility itself as well as the overarching CA SGF project implementation approach. The instruments required to deliver Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation should have the capacity to adjust over time to employ adaptive management practices to provide the support required for effective local adaptation interventions. The next section draws upon learnings from the CA SGF project and outlines how lessons may be applied throughout the project lifecycle to demonstrate the agility and capacity required.

“
[Donor institutions] need to come to the communities to see this. They must interact with the people, not just for an hour, but to actually sit down and learn.”

Small Grant Recipient, Inter-district Learning Event, June 2019



Above: Small Grant Recipients in the Mopani District share their experiences of receiving and managing climate funds (Photo: SANBI).

Key Approaches and Emerging Lessons

The following sections describe the application of key approaches within the CA SGF project to adapting standard project lifecycle phases to practical periods of activity, and the lessons that emerged from this.

The main themes are provided in Figure 1 below, followed by a more detailed explanation.



Figure 1: Key approaches to success mapped against the project lifecycle.

Inception / conceptualisation and design phase

Partnerships played a key role throughout the CA SGF project's planning and implementation phases. The conceptualisation of the project design required considerable high-level leadership; for the CA SGF project, this occurred at the national level because international funds from the Adaptation Fund were to be released to the National Implementing Entity, which was ultimately responsible for their stewardship. The partnerships facilitated at this phase investigated and collected information in order to design a project management structure and devise a granting process in alignment with international donor expectations as well as local needs.

The incorporation of feedback from communities most directly involved in climate change adaptation projects is required to ensure that local needs are at the centre of project design. To assist in facilitating this, partnerships with academic and research institutes as well as local government and community-based organisations can facilitate direct input through various participatory methodologies. The information collected from communities must be then married to the most recent climate science.

In the project design phase, the CA SGF project used participatory research conducted in each region, collating the information to inform project design with reference to the investment windows.

The process of collecting information must be participatory and inclusive. Despite being a process led by high-level stakeholders, partnering with local entities can facilitate direct input from communities. Local entities should not, however, supplant or replace information from community members. Substantive interaction with communities

requires skilfully designed and facilitated engagements, often in a local language, and time and resources should be allocated to ensure an intricate understanding of community priorities, contextual drivers and influencing factors.

The extent of capacity building required for the achievement of project goals should be clearly articulated. Capacity should be understood within the context of international donor requirements and the governance systems of the institutional actors, applying a clear and contextualised definition of capacities across the system. This includes a clear understanding of international donor compliance and reporting requirements, what is required of each role player within the Project Management Team and from the community-level project implementers. This could be framed within each phase of the project lifecycle to better articulate evolving capacity needs. Assessing strengths and capacity gaps within the Project Management Team and analysing these can assist in identifying what types of additional resources and experts may be required.

Adopting a "holistic approach" leverages opportunities to link entities and processes for optimal systemic influence. The ultimate goal in design is to not only implement adaptation measures at the community level but also to have a deep impact on regional resilience and strengthen mechanisms for continued work towards that effort. National and/or regional administrations have the insight of governance systems and policy to identify and draw those strategic connections. The holistic approach promotes sustainability for the interventions identified in the Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation project.

Planning phase

This phase involves ensuring that project management systems are established and functioning for the selection of grantees and the subsequent implementation of the Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation projects. Establishing tools and systems to translate, understand and assess capacity needs are also critical. Roles, responsibilities and communication strategies should be well articulated alongside criteria and mechanisms that

allow for responsive action throughout the project. The establishment of systems that accommodate international donor requirements and community needs requires the alignment of the requisite oversight, monitoring and support functions with the inherent necessity to be contextually relevant and responsive. A balance between robust systems and agile, responsive ones is key.

Below the high-level strategic role of the National Adaptation Funds Advisory Body, formerly known as the National Implementing Entity Steering Committee, the CA SGF project had three layers of administrative oversight, the National Implementing Entity, the Executing Entity and two Facilitating Agencies, one in each District to provide local support. Efficiency may be created by reducing the number of layers of authority. For example, eliminating or limiting the role of the Executing Entity or National Adaptation Funds Advisory Body, while better resourcing a robust and specialised team within the Facilitating Agencies, who are integrally familiar with the communities in which they work, may increase efficiency. Regardless of the project management structure, clear articulation of the roles, responsibilities and lines of authority are required; the entity closest to the communities implementing project should be allocated as much decision-making authority as possible to allow responsive action to community needs. Project management relationships benefit from partnerships rather than purely transactional engagements.

A clear understanding is required of the requisite skills and knowledge to implement, manage, monitor and report on community based adaptation projects. Tools to assess grant applicants and subsequent project implementers need to be robust but also dynamic – allowing and enabling the incremental realisation of standards to meet aspirational project standards. Within the CA SGF project, the importance of clearly articulating reporting and compliance requirements and assessing community organisations' capacities against those requirements was critical. Needs assessments require responsive and continual, including informal, customised capacity building and mentorship. This necessitates a comprehensive and clear understanding of the required skills and knowledge as well as systems and role players with the ability to quickly respond to unanticipated needs throughout each community adaptation project.

The grant application and planning period is the opportune time to understand and develop capacity in communities and local organisations. The CA SGF project implemented

a two-phased approach to contracting in the Mopani District, which offered resources and technical assistance to strengthen project concepts. A grants facility could consider expanding this process by offering applicants that propose approved adaptation project concepts, and who are able to demonstrate an acceptable level of organisational accountability, core funding for operational costs and relevant staff salaries during the preparation and design phase. Support during this phase could include: mentorship to strengthen project concepts, the identification of areas of innovation and co-benefits; strengthening of administration, governance and financial capacity; and familiarisation of project management.

The allocation of time and other resources spent preparing communities and local organisations could remain separate from implementation, effectively enabling intensive and customised capacity building while promoting a holistic approach and sustainable community adaptation interventions. Reflections from CA SGF project managers point out that, although this may be considered by some to be a costly exercise for very little return in the form of adaptation outcomes, the ultimate cost may be less than the alternative. There is value for money in proper planning and preparation. In addition, organisational capacity at the community level builds resilience and therefore should qualify as an appropriate adaptation strategy.

The final design of each Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation project should adopt a holistic approach and incorporate sustainability mechanisms. Taking a holistic approach requires the identification of opportunities to integrate interventions within the framework that climate science presents in terms of local climate projections and impacts. Activities that create virtuous cycles which reduce dependence on inputs or materials outside of the local area, including those which result in less tangible outcomes (such as infrastructure resilience in the light of climatic events), multiply positive outcomes and generate sustainable impacts. Additionally, identifying activities or interventions that address multiple barriers to resilience demonstrates holistic integration and reduces overall vulnerability.

Project implementation and monitoring phase

In the two-phase process envisaged above, the first phase consists of building a foundational technical understanding of the climate change adaptation intervention, putting into place administrative and financial systems, and enhancing capacity. The second phase is reserved primarily for implementation and achieving adaptation outcomes, supported by efficient and effective project management. For the most part, the CA SGF project was required to build capacity in multiple areas during the implementation phase, which required intensive resources and potentially distracted focus from the technical aspects of the climate change adaptation intervention itself.

This model would need to consider how and what elements of the oversight and management authority could be devolved to the local level to ensure community adaptation projects remain, from an individual project level and throughout the grants facility, community driven. Mechanisms would need to be in place for communication and input to be received and provided by the higher levels of strategic management to engage with the projects at the local level, through learning platforms facilitated to reflect on and integrate best practices for adaptation, rather than project administration.

The Partnerships, which proved extremely valuable during CA SGF project implementation, take on increased importance in the expanded model, which envisages the grant beneficiaries in close partnership with the Facilitating Agencies in project delivery. The CA SGF project entered into grant contracts which saw the grant recipients framed as service providers accountable to an Executing Entity and National Implementing Entity who were, for the most part, removed from project realities and lacked insights into community dynamics, relying on the Facilitating Agencies to bridge the gap. Involving grant recipients as part of the refined articulation of interventions, including the roles and responsibilities of project management, such as compliance requirements, serves to empower the recipients to access the network of actors which are critical for effective project implementation and longer-

term sustainability. Compliance oversight and meeting of grant conditions then becomes an activity driven by grant recipients, rather than perceived as being imposed by outside entities. Despite clear lines of authority, project management becomes a partnership whereby local knowledge and priorities are valued alongside regional and national ones.

A systemic view of capacity and the tactics required to build capacity effectively requires continuous learning within each Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation project and within the project management system as a whole. Continual “capacity building” support for the community implementers demands refined tools and responsive mechanisms to address the breadth of tangible and intangible capacities required throughout implementation. Elements of the capacity building could build on the seven elements of organisational capacity identified in the CA SGF project processes, as set out in Case Study #4 of this series: identity, leadership, human capital, organisation, community adaptation, project management and financial management. Or a new capacity matrix could draw on an adapted version suitable for the context.

Means to promote sustainability should be implemented throughout; capacity building within organisations and communities is one way to promote the continuity of activities after the project closes. Noting and addressing unanticipated barriers to sustainability is a component of adaptive management practices within this phase. Establishing a strong culture of good governance and effective management takes significant time and investment – requiring these activities to be started early. This includes promoting relational skills, such as conflict negotiation, as well as tangible skills in climate change adaptation.

Top right: A Technical Advisory Group representative from the local government, sharing best practice recommendations for successful project design, Mopani District (Photo: SANBI); Below right: A local community participatory engagement to identify climate vulnerabilities, as part of the project development process, in the Ga-Ntata village, Mopani District (Photo: SANBI).



Project termination and close out phase

Project close-out means formal withdrawal of overall support and resources, but it does not, or should not, mean all project activities cease. Close-out activities focus on solidifying mechanisms to promote the continuation of climate change adaptation activities long after overall project termination. Identifying opportunities to resolve outstanding barriers to sustainable functioning, including revenue generation, links to formal governmental social-development services and linking up with other programmes that can deliver targeted support are examples of such mechanisms.

Although communication remains streamlined, the “partnership” engagement is cascaded through the Project Management Team to community beneficiaries. Convening across the whole management spectrum with participation from a wider range of stakeholders occurs to identify strategic linkages in support of individual projects as well as regional resilience. The Project Management Team facilitates engagements with communities involved to incorporate learnings from their perspective and identify ways to promote their ability to operate independently.

Capacity building achievements during the project noted recommendations for continued strengthening, which could provide a plan forward to ensure that communities continue to grow their skills as well as promote intergenerational learning and succession planning. Assisting leaders in communities and community organisations to conduct their own needs assessments could assist in articulating needs for support in the future.

Project close-out includes reporting requirements that accompany funded programmes of this nature. These requirements may demand considerable resources on the part of local organisations and communities where time and resources are often scarce. The support required to reflect and collect information, as well as complete final monitoring on project outcomes and performance should be budgeted as an additional cost on top of project implementation and could constitute the final disbursement, incentivising final reporting and winding up of all loose ends for each project.

Conclusion

The CA SGF project management systems celebrated many successes, as well as offered findings that could be useful to those involved in Enhanced Direct Access climate finance. As an outcome of a constantly changing context and programmatic aspirations for Community-Based Climate Change Adaptation, the project management system encountered tensions in its attempts to meet donor expectations and support locally-driven interventions. This dynamism – the interaction of context and aspiration – is one well known to development policy-makers, administrators and practitioners. Achieving measurable programmatic advances at scale presents many challenges when so much depends on the context and on local variables.

An enabling environment incorporates mechanisms to promote community engagement and involvement in project management. Furthermore, it provides a structure within which communities have expertise and resources to implement climate change adaptation measures that suit their needs and priorities while ensuring that capacity-building efforts are delivered to enhance local and regional resilience. Systems put in place should have the capacity to deliver on robust oversight challenges while remaining agile and responsive to local needs and efforts to meet them. In addition to creating more effective project management, this also provides an opportunity to take development challenges further and establishes policy and procedural approaches that represent progress towards effective climate change adaptation.

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