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CBA18 key messages

The 18th Community-Based Adaptation Conference (CBA18) took place in Arusha, Tanzania from 6–9 May 2024 and attracted 320 participants from a wide range of actors. This included people with a longer history of participation as well as relative newcomers to the CBA space.

The new sectors and actors represented at the conference this year ranged from those in anticipatory action, geospatial tools and the use of virtual reality to those in value mapping (including non-economic value discussions) and in eco-anxiety and the links with health and adaptation. Attendees included Indigenous Peoples (IP), young people, disabled people, community members championing adaptation actions, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiators, entrepreneurs from the global South, donors, academics, local governments and many NGOs.

The conference set out to fulfil its principles of interactivity and diversity of perspectives, and create an inclusive and participatory space in all the different types of sessions, from plenaries to open spaces, contributing to a cross-fertilisation of knowledge.

Under the overarching themes of decolonising climate action and locally led innovation through locally led adaptation (LLA), participants at CBA18 jointly explored topics such as climate finance, indigenous knowledge and nature-based solutions, loss and damage, climate risks and anticipatory action, local government roles, business and private sector linkages, intersectionality, and measuring and monitoring.

Six key messages emerged from the multi-layered conversations across the conference:

1. It is time to focus on 'implementing LLA' through shifting mindsets
2. Taking an inclusive, intersectional, community based approach is critical to success
3. Indigenous values and environmental stewardship have important lessons for adaptation
4. Skilled knowledge brokering is a must for co-creation of LLA solutions and policy messages
5. Locally driven and determined climate finance is a precondition for implementing LLA
6. Opportunities exist to engage the private sector in LLA

1. It is time to focus on 'implementing LLA' through shifting mindsets

LLA needs to move from widespread endorsement to real implementation. Shifting decision-making power to those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, where there is a depth of understanding of local dynamics and context required for effective action, takes work. It necessitates a significant change in resource development and delivery, driven by

LLA endorsers. Funding flows were a major concern at CBA18, but the shift not only involves money but also respecting and working collaboratively with people and communities vulnerable to climate change as trusted decision makers and active agents of change, away from the mindset of targeted recipients of funding and capacity building. It also means intentionally putting local knowledge, rights, capacity, gender equality and social inclusion, environmental stewardship, innovation and community at the centre.

“In taking a locally led approach to adaptation, we need to unlearn and relearn, change the way we have been doing ‘development’ for years and ‘shift the system’. It will be difficult. It demands individual mindset and systemic shifts but it is worth it to ensure adaptation results in equitable benefits.”

- Aurélie Ceinos, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

There are barriers to change founded on colonial top-down thinking that systemically limit funding, exclude IP, young people, disabled people and communities from decision making, and hinder a shift in the mindsets of all actors — adaptation practitioners, donors, governments and communities — towards fostering equal relationships.

This shift will enable planning with communities as equal actors and can be supported and mainstreamed in government and civil society organisation (CSO) planning processes. “Whose knowledge counts?” was a question posed early in CBA18 that can help with this change. Negotiators present at CBA18 left with a strong appreciation of the message that they encountered in many of the discussions: “put community at the centre”.

2. Taking an inclusive, intersectional, community based approach is critical to success

LLA Principle 2 emphasises the need to address structural inequalities faced by women, young people, children, disabled people, displaced people, IP and marginalised ethnic groups. An intersectional approach acknowledges the multiple, intersecting identities that shape people. A young pastoralist indigenous mother possesses different knowledge and experience compared to an older disabled widow in an informal settlement or an educated youth activist. Beyond the risks and vulnerabilities they face, each individual brings unique capacities and solutions to the table.

“An intersectional approach is not only about vulnerability; it is also about celebrating and learning from diversity.”

- Viola Musiiimenta, African Center for Trade and Development (ACTADE)

Inclusive programming requires understanding the specific context, including issues like tribal diversity, social and cultural diversity, and political influence. It involves examining hierarchies, recognising differences within vulnerable groups and understanding the dynamics of powerholders. This means creating inclusive and safe spaces where everyone can participate meaningfully and express themselves, and allow an understanding of their different lived realities and an opportunity for new insights and solutions to emerge. When marginalised people are represented by intermediaries, these intermediaries must first learn from and work to empower those they represent. Beyond an approach of addressing inequalities, LLA should focus on including the voices and values of all actors.

“You can’t plan for me without me. Nothing for us without us.”

- UnaMay Gordon, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

Young people are especially vulnerable, facing an uncertain future with increasing climate impacts. They need to be informed, tell their stories and get involved in the governance of projects, climate actions and policymaking processes concerning their communities and their generation. Empowering young people unleashes their creativity in communication, technology, mobilising action and advocating for intergenerational climate justice.

Intersectional approaches help to surface the emotions and feelings that drive our decisions and ability to take action. Discussions on eco-anxiety and mental health, new topics at CBA18, recognise the growing concern in both the global North and South, particularly but not only among young people. Community and (re-)connection to nature emerged as important sources of support. As climate risks and impacts become more extreme, adaptation projects must intentionally address social and mental wellbeing and integrate support systems for eco-anxiety. Raising awareness about future climate scenarios, combined with early warning systems to develop anticipatory action and LLA planning and action, can provide a sense of purpose and hope, helping to combat eco-anxiety.

3. Indigenous values and environmental stewardship have important lessons for adaptation

A key message from CBA18 was the critical importance of indigenous and local knowledge and the values held by IP. These are often overlooked but essential for achieving climate resilience, as IP have a deep connection to the land and natural resources, which hold intrinsic, economic and non-economic values and are key to their collective approach to life. These have informed how they are already adapting to climate impacts with the support of their ancestral knowledge systems, cosmology and practices. Their collective rights, such as the right to free, prior and informed consent, are recognised in multiple conventions and should inform adaptation decisions and processes.

What is needed is for IP to be part of a conversation among equals, with all actors learning from each other and co-creating solutions. They need more opportunities to learn about climate change, to express their lived experience and the challenges they face, and to access and be part of adaptation and funding decisions. At the same time, local governments and NGOs need support to interact meaningfully (using local languages and communication approaches), gather and use climate and indigenous knowledge, and create inclusive adaptation planning processes.

Starting from a deep understanding of diversity in context, cultures and values (eg through stakeholder rights and value mapping) fosters a collaborative process that is not only based on local knowledge but also cultivates trust and understanding among all actors, fostering a sense of ownership among community members. Knowing and fostering a values-driven ethos ensures that adaptation efforts remain firmly rooted in the collective heart and soul of the community and can lead to locally led innovations for sustainable and climate resilient livelihoods.

4. Skilled knowledge brokering is a must for co-creation of LLA solutions and policy messages

How do practitioners and advocates make sure that locally led principles are driving adaptation? CBA18 emphasised that how LLA is implemented is as important as what LLA is. LLA works when relationships and power dynamics among multiple and diverse actors are engaged at all levels, from inclusive planning and action at the community level to

national and global policy and finance decisions. LLA calls for systemic shifts; how can these be best motivated and realised?

The key message was that explicit attention needs to be paid to system change and social processes to democratise adaptation. Projects should not dictate solutions but rather convene, facilitate, create a space for interaction, understanding and collective decisions, and enable the confidence and the agency of people to be strengthened. The focus should be on co-creating interventions with concerned and diverse actors that allow communities to build resilience on their terms and with the support they need, using diverse and appropriate sources and types of knowledge.

Knowledge brokering, designing, convening and facilitating these multi-stakeholder co-creation processes are the often invisible activities that impactful projects use to enable equitable and locally owned planning, decisions, innovation and action. How well these processes are facilitated may determine the outcome more than other factors. Yet adaptation actors and donors have paid little attention to what it takes for these to be successful. There is an urgent need to actively strengthen knowledge and skills in facilitating social processes, participatory decision making and system change.

Creative communications have also proven to be very effective in communicating the complexity of adaptation and helping trigger conversations, including intergenerationally. CBA18 participants highlighted the need to ensure communication on adaptation is tailored to different audiences and involves diverse perspectives. It might involve translating materials into targeted local languages, broadcasting radio programmes at certain times of the day to reach key groups (eg women, young people and elders), using images to allow for different literacy levels, and using sign language or other ways to engage people with specific disabilities. Songs, interactive radio programming and community listening groups, role-play, theatre and storytelling are among the approaches that were presented during the conference.

While national adaptation planning processes are lengthy, adaptation projects often put their efforts into climate risk assessments and the implementation of technical solutions — the activities that are easily described and resourced. Participatory and regular adaptation planning, which involves unpacking assessment findings, creating future visions, collectively developing informed and inclusive plans, and agreeing on how plans will be resourced and implemented, is given less attention, time and resource. Many projects have already predetermined the interventions they will support, so that time given to assessment and planning is not valued or used. Is this a colonial legacy shaping us to value external research and interventions over facilitating collectively determined change?

Local governments play a vital role in unlocking the full potential of LLA and connecting locally led planning to budgets and action. They can also support the integration of local priorities and knowledge into national processes to ensure national adaptation plans respond to local needs. But they often lack the resources, capacity and governance structures needed to advance adaptation at the pace and scale needed. Practitioners should leverage local government planning, budgeting and reporting structures as entry points for anchoring, mainstreaming and implementing LLA, while also advocating for them to learn from and integrate local knowledge and help convene stakeholders.

5. Locally driven and determined climate finance is a precondition for implementing LLA

Finance was a major concern across many CBA18 sessions. Some funders have endorsed the LLA principles and are making efforts to improve financing systems. While there was high demand for funders to be closer to communities, LLA must not create more donor-driven bureaucracy. Instead, CBA18 urges the creation of funding mechanisms in collaboration with funders, intermediaries and the local actors who should benefit from the funding. This would include the co-creation of policies, proposal formats, guidelines, monitoring frameworks, measurement tools and formats, and any other requirements with higher funder transparency, thus helping to ensure more context-based, flexible and impactful funding.

There is a need to build more intentional trust and relationships between funders and implementers. Even if some donors have developed mechanisms for local organisations to access adaptation funding, they have often maintained compliance rules that restrict access to it. This has sometimes even resulted in requiring local organisations to go through numerous intermediaries, reducing the amount of funding that actually reaches communities. The long chain is also a barrier to communication and transparency. An important step would be for funders to talk directly to targeted vulnerable communities before developing their funding strategy, or when data and needs have already been gathered by others to use this information to inform their strategy. It would also be important to give an opportunity for local actors to have a say in shaping and validating the strategy.

Community based organisations and local CSOs should be given the opportunity to then shape how proposals are developed and how project results and impacts are monitored on their own terms and based on their priorities. Using open-source and inclusive technology, including photos, videos, storytelling, voice notes and presentations (ie beyond written proposals and reports) as well as digital monitoring systems that allow easy data capture and sharing, would facilitate community led project design and submission.

“We’ve got so used to following a system that we’ve forgotten that we have the freedom to do things differently.”

- Zahid Amin Shashoto, Uttaran

The onus should be on the funder to build trust and an accessible, open relationship with the grantees, understand their context and find ways to interpret and assess submissions, asking for explanations as needed. Community led monitoring, evaluation and learning systems should be prioritised and the reporting systems should share information with communities as well as with donors, for mutual accountability.

Donors should consider risk management strategies that allow long-term funding based on trust, with the amounts increasing as the relationship grows and the recipients enhance their absorptive capacity. Investing longer term, with staged investment, is starting to be seen. For example, with donors pioneering participatory grant mechanisms such as the Climate Justice Resilience Fund or devolved climate finance mechanisms such as the Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL) and the LDC Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR), which are encouraged to share their experiences widely and promote their approaches to other funders and actors.

Empowering local actors to develop adaptation projects with direct access to finance would in turn strengthen the importance of quality, intersectional risk and vulnerability assessments

and informed participatory planning processes. Assessment and planning processes are essential to resilience impacts but are often paid lip service in the face of top-down funding decision making. They ensure adaptation projects are locally owned and accountable to the people they are intended for. Supporting domestic funding mechanisms and influencing governments to integrate LLA into their plans and budgets will bring finance decisions closer to where they are needed. Finance for capacity building should also be easier to access for local governments and CSOs at all levels, to ensure well-informed, locally led planning for adaptation and project design.

6. Opportunities exist to engage the private sector in LLA

The private sector can bring innovation and efficiency in the provision of services to support communities' sustainability, as opposed to time-bound funding projects. However, engaging the diverse private sector in climate-resilient development involves trade-offs, opportunities and challenges.

Linking local businesses' climate action to private sector investment requires tailored financing solutions for entities ranging from small businesses and community based enterprises to large corporations and startups. This can include grants, debts and microfinance, facilitated by intermediaries (NGOs and financial institutions) to help broker and facilitate the development of these complex but innovative and high-potential mechanisms. Prioritising local market access and development plus access to financial resources are key.

Funders need to offer strategic support to enable smaller businesses such as small and medium sized enterprises to contribute to the adaptation economy by scaling up successful pilots, strengthening their market linkages, supporting innovation and leveraging private sector investment. Yet mainstream grant funding for adaptation must be careful to avoid distorting markets and undermining local businesses.

The private sector landscape is varied and ranges from multinational, big corporations to small, medium and even informal enterprises. While some companies are mainly driven by profit and have no interest in contributing to the environment and climate preservation, there are others that, although profit-driven, have social and environmental values at their core and are looking for incentives to consider their impacts on the landscape, biodiversity or medium- to long-term changes. These private sector companies can be allies and should become part of the adaptation practitioner community. They can play a stronger role in scaling up some adaptation innovations or engaging other private sectors in CBA using LLA principles. For example, they can convene market system stakeholders, facilitate equitable dialogue and support local groups in improving their market access and voice. They can act as watchdogs and call out issues, playing a safeguarding role. And they can advocate for enabling policies and incentives from governments, fostering equitable partnerships, and initiating participatory processes to address their needs and challenges.

Recognising that part of the private sector is contributing to the climate crisis and not supporting adaptation as it should do, it is also essential to find ways to persuade that private sector as well as governments to invest in adaptation but also to recognise and use environmental standards and traditional ecological knowledge. It is time for the private sector to engage more in adaptation and be held accountable for the real costs of the environmental capital they exploit and to better incentivise regenerative resource management. There is an opportunity to research and develop more models that blend public and private finance with civil society roles as watchdogs and community

representatives, to enable the restoration of landscapes, provide dividends to communities and crowd in private sector investment in adaptation.

“It is up to us to pitch adaptation so that it makes business sense — the private sector is set up to make a profit. If we can put forward the business case, the sector will be more likely to understand there is a market for them in this, with tangible benefits.”

- Samson Mbewe, SouthSouthNorth

NGOs need to support and ensure that companies and governments work together to ensure that ecosystems are preserved and restored through private sector engagement (taking a landscape approach). They can convene different kinds of stakeholders to strategically plan how markets can support climate-resilient development and act as a watchdog for environmental risk and safeguarding challenges. They can also support cooperatives and community led businesses in accessing the market and supporting the process of market development with short-, medium- and long-term impact assessments of market investments.



Participants from around the world get together in person at CBA18 in Arusha, Tanzania. (Photo: IIED)

The way ahead

The four days of discussion and debate reinforced the messages that the CBA community of practice has been advocating on for more than a decade. The business unusual models we advocate for through these platforms are challenging and need to go beyond isolated projects and programmes. At CBA18, practitioners not only showcased best practices but also reflected on and called out what is hindering the scale up of these practices beyond the CBA bubble of practitioners to reach a wider range of stakeholders globally.

During the closing plenary session, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Vice Chair Dr Ladislaus Chang’a said: “CBA has been informative, impactful and exciting. We are better today than yesterday.” He also emphasised how valuable this practitioner knowledge is and that we need to work on mechanisms to share this information in scientifically understandable language, so that these great practices can be reflected in future IPCC reports.

As the Masia traditional healer closed the conference with the blessings: “Give us the wisdom to do more and better,” we echo the same for all the adaptation practitioners.

About CBA18

CBA18 brought together practitioners, grassroots representatives, local and national government planners, policymakers and donors working at all levels and scales to discuss how we can drive ambition for a climate-resilient future. The conference was co-hosted by Tanzania People & Wildlife and was recognised by and received the support of the government of Tanzania.

Host partners



Contributing partners



We would also like to thank the Tanzania Advisory Group for supporting the hosting of CBA18: CARE Tanzania, Forum for Climate Change, Foundation for Civil Society, Pamoja Youth Initiative, Tanzania Natural Resources Forum, Trias and Ujamaa Community Resource Team.