



# Unpacking transformation:

## A framework and insights from adaptation mainstreaming

The increasing scale and severity of the impacts of climate change have enabled a growing discourse on the need for transformation in the resilience of social, human, physical, financial, and political systems. However, there remains little consensus amongst practitioners on what constitutes transformational change in mainstreaming adaptation within development policy and practice and how to support it. This paper by ACT aims to address this gap by using five case studies from South Asia to demonstrate the ways in which technical assistance programmes on adaptation can support and facilitate transformational change.

The Action on Climate Today (ACT) programme works in partnership with ten national and sub-national governments in South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, to integrate climate change adaptation into development planning and delivery. Building on the experience of the ACT programme, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for assessing progress towards transformational change in adaptation. It consists of three components: 1) the enabling environment - the factors that predate and support transformational change; 2) transformational domains - the route by which transformational change is achieved; and 3) transformational characteristics - the indicators of transformational change. The framework can be used by practitioners and policy-makers to understand, strengthen and monitor the likelihood of transformational change in adaptation.

A full description of ACT's work can be found in the associated ACT learning paper, **Unpacking transformation: A framework and insights from adaptation mainstreaming**.



## 1. SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The first characteristic that needs to be present for an initiative to be deemed likely to lead to transformation relates to enabling systemic change. Systems can be altered in different ways, including building new institutions or enhancing capacity of existing ones to trigger and sustain transformation. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, ACT altered existing climate finance governance systems by establishing and strengthening Climate Finance Units (CFUs) within each country. By focusing on these institutions ACT has significantly enhanced the countries' commitment and capacity to secure adaptation funds in the long-term.

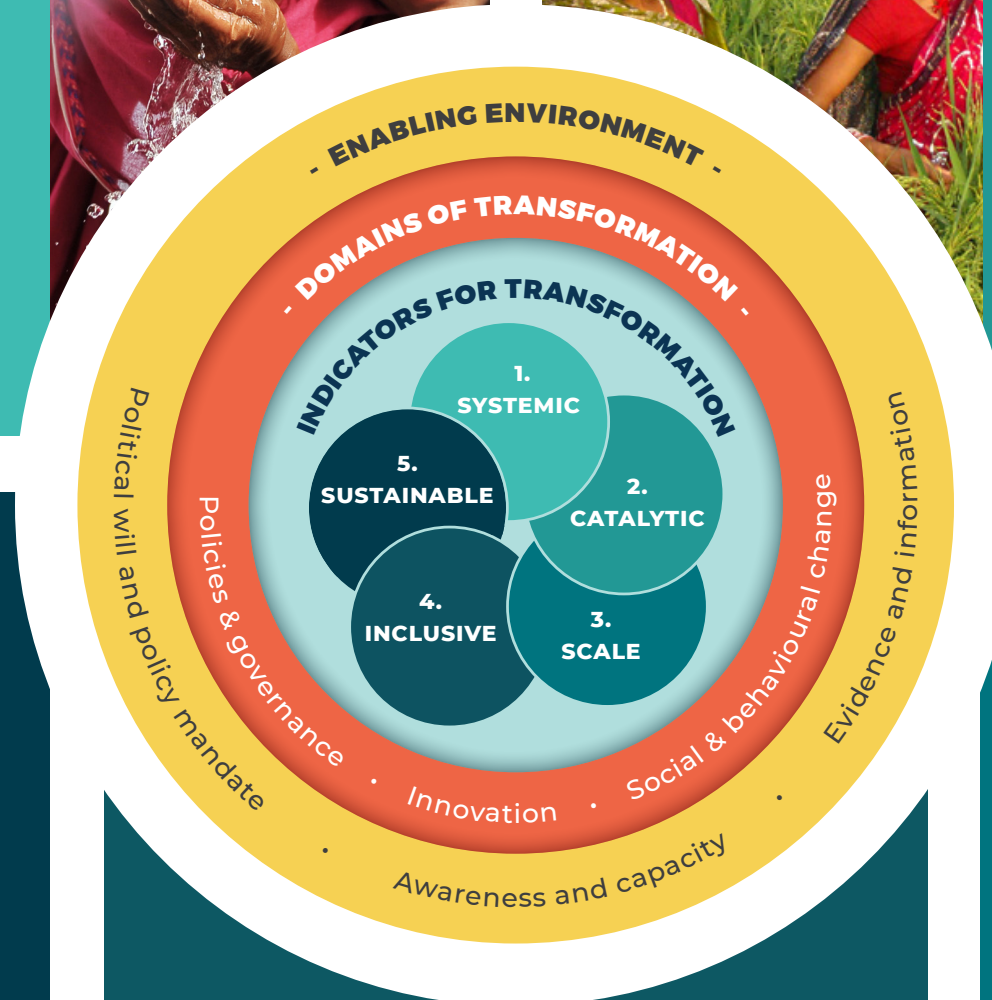


## 2. CATALYSE BROADER CHANGE

Secondly, adaptation initiatives that are likely to result in transformation should also be able to catalyse broader change. Deliberate systemic and other changes resulting from initiatives should trigger additional shifts in systems and structures or be replicated in different contexts. ACT has leveraged the resources of the World Bank Climate Resilient Agriculture (PoCRA) programme to support a new approach to promoting climate-resilient crops through Farmer Producer Companies (farmers' cooperatives). ACT helped overcome a crucial trust deficit between FPCs and Institutional Financial Lenders (IFLs) by developing a rating tool for credit to be made available to FPCs while promoting climate-resilient practices. PoCRA is using this tool to identify and address capacity gaps within 620 FPCs.

## 5. SUSTAINABLE

Finally, for initiatives to trigger transformation, its impact needs to be sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme. This could be done in various ways including through codifying a new policy within law, fundamentally shifting perceptions and behaviour, and establishing or strengthening institutions to continue the work. In Nepal, ACT increased the evidence base on climate change by strengthening the Central Bureau of Statistics' (CBS') long-term commitment and capabilities to collect and analyse relevant data, instead of a one-off survey. As a result, CBS formed an internal technical committee on climate change which has already begun integrating climate change within other surveys in the country.



## 4. INCLUSIVE

At its core, transformation should be inclusive of vulnerable, poor and marginalised populations. Therefore, initiatives aiming for transformation should prioritise the most vulnerable and ensure that their voices are included in the programme's design and implementation. ACT supported the Government of Bihar and stakeholders to fundamentally shift their perception of sedimentation, from a liability to an opportunity to increase the livelihoods of poor and marginalised local people. A silt management plan, developed in consultation with local stakeholders, reduced the exposure of vulnerable communities to flooding, while providing income generation opportunities from the use of silt (e.g. in brick-making and ceramics), thereby ensuring regular and sustainable de-siltation.

## 3. OPERATE AT SCALE

Initiatives built to deliver transformation need to operate at scale. While the definition of scale may vary based on the context and resources available, such initiatives must ultimately aim for 'system' level changes. In Odisha, ACT supported the government to redevelop the Mahanadi river basin's flood warning system through a new localised weather-based model, which has led to an increase in the warning time from 8 hours to 36-72 hours. This will significantly improve resilience of the 10 million people covered by the system and has also led to revisions of broader disaster and resource management protocols.





# Key Lessons from ACT's Experience:

**1. Characteristics of transformation should guide programme design:** The characteristics outlined in the paper should be used as 'guiding pillars' for interventions that aim to support transformation.

**2. Action to deliver transformational change entails trade-offs:** Technical assistance programmes will need to mindfully navigate trade-offs to determine the most judicious pathway for achieving transformational change, aligned to the scope of the initiative.

**3. Keep the question: transformation... 'of what', 'for what' and 'for whom' in perspective:** While building resilience, it is vital to identify the entity being made resilient, the reason for building resilience, and who will benefit from the resilience building action.

**4. Adaptive management is key for enabling transformation:** Programmes that aim to deliver transformation need to be flexible, decentralised and have dedicated resources that can be deployed to exploit unexpected windows of opportunity.

**5. Aiming for transformational change may not always be feasible or desirable:** Transformational adaptation in a specific region is generally driven by large scale and acute vulnerability, or amplified climate impacts. However, there are instances where short-term interventions focused on incremental shifts are preferable, and may be combined with other ongoing interventions to feasibly support transformational change in the future.

**6. Building an enabling environment:** An enabling environment is key to successfully supporting systemic transformation. It needs to be approached via a strong contextual analysis of the political economy of the geography, institutional dynamics, and resources and capacity of local stakeholders to effectively facilitate processes of change.

**7. Theory-based monitoring and evaluation offers one flexible approach to analyse change but other approaches are needed:** Theory-based approaches (such as theory of change) offer an entry point, but strong programme capacity is also needed to implement more sophisticated monitoring systems. Post-end line evaluations should also be considered to measure 'actual' as opposed to 'inferred' transformation.

**8. Changing complex systems is transformational:** Without an explicit understanding of how systems shape a context and particular problem, the fundamental features of transformational change cannot take root.

**9. Discuss transformational change with a degree of rigour:** Transformation must not become the new policy buzz word that is used without adequate reflection. A degree of rigour in its use and new analytical frameworks that serve the needs of adaptation programming at different scales, sectors, geographies and political contexts are required

*These and other lessons from the ACT programme are elaborated in the ACT learning paper: **Unpacking Transformation: A Framework and Insights from Adaptation Mainstreaming***

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