



# Building institutional capacity for enhancing resilience to climate change:

## An operational framework and insights from practice

The scale and uncertainty of the long-term impacts of climate change, its complex and cross-cutting nature, the urgency of action required, and the power asymmetries that exist between different actors mean that managing climate change poses an acute institutional challenge. Most countries are struggling to build the institutional capabilities required to tackle climate change across different levels of government.

The Action on Climate Today (ACT) programme has worked at the national and sub-national level in five countries in South Asia to help strengthen institutions' capabilities to integrate climate change into policies, plans and budgets, and to attract climate change investment. This learning brief presents a new framework, based on learning from the programme, for strengthening institutional climate capabilities to guide those designing, planning and delivering other programmes and initiatives.

A full description of ACT's work can be found in the associated ACT learning paper: Building institutional capacity for enhancing resilience to climate change: An operational framework and insights from practice.

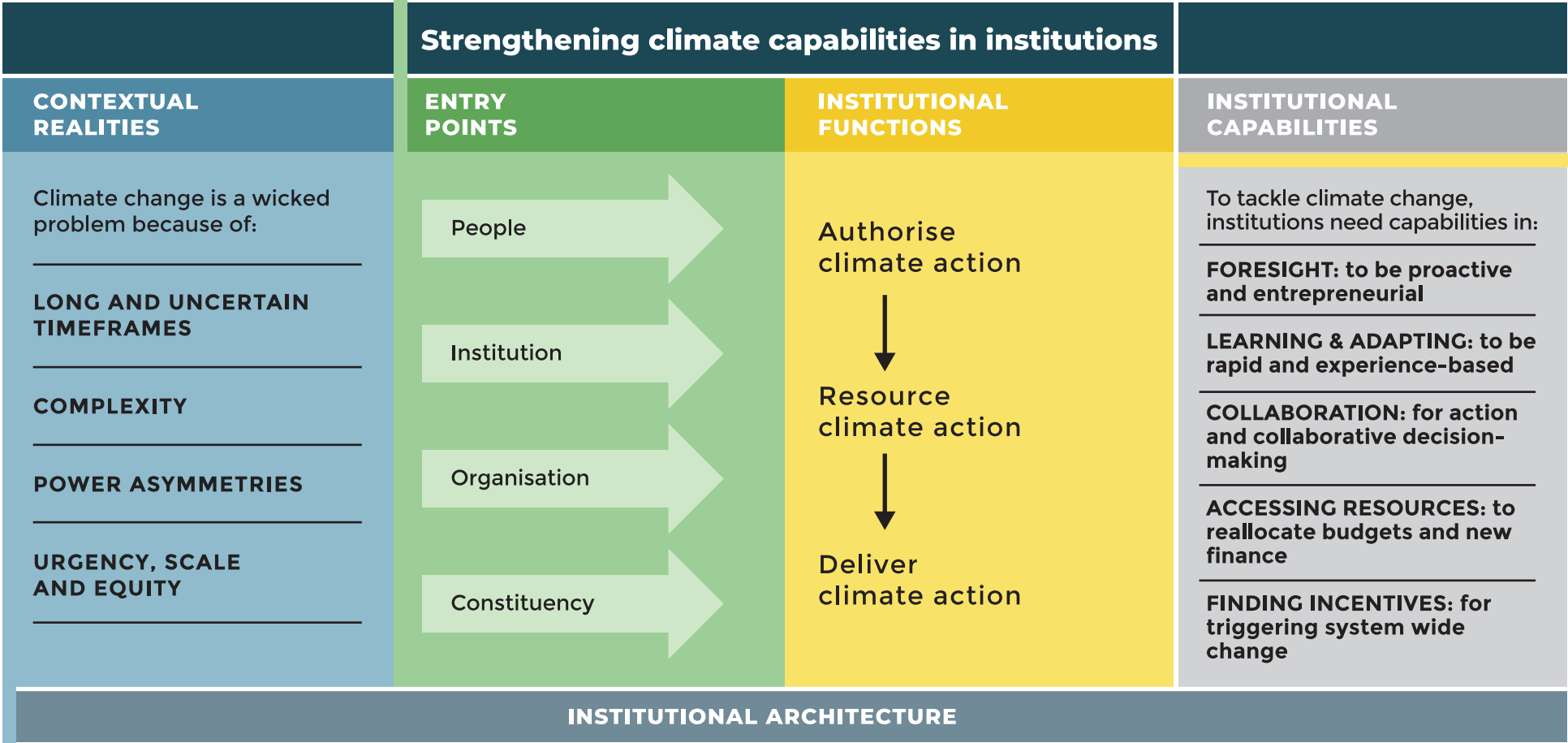




ENTRY POINTS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

ACT has built capacity for adaptation by addressing institutions and stakeholders at several levels using both formal and informal approaches:

- **People, and their knowledge and skills:** ACT has supported Afghanistan in establishing a Climate Finance Unit (CFU) staffed by government officials and ACT technical experts, who are providing day-to-day transfer of skills and building leadership from within, in addition to formal training and exposure visits to other CFUs. from within, formal training, and exposure visits to other country CFUs.
- **Organisations, and their plans and decision-support tools:** In 2017, the Maharashtra Cabinet approved the establishment of its “Climate Change Cell” within the Environment Department. This decision was the result of two years of advocacy and technical support by ACT’s local team, including drafting terms of reference and an operational plan for the cell.
- **Institutions, that define social norms:** ACT helped the Government of Kerala integrate climate change into its Five-Year Plan (2017-22). The team also prepared guidelines and conducted trainings with a government training institute for local governments to operationalise it.
- **Constituency, that provides legitimacy to climate action:** ACT has helped build capacity within Afghanistan’s nascent civil society to establish a National Steering Group for the Climate Action Network. This included formal training, opportunities for networking, and linking the organisations to counterparts across the region.



STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL FUNCTIONS

ACT’s strategy involves focusing on the different roles of institutions - from authorising climate action, to resourcing, and then delivering the required actions.

- **Authorising climate action** requires the leadership to build and maintain political commitment, mandate institutions with responsibilities, and hold these institutions accountable. For example, in Maharashtra, ACT strengthened the policy framework to authorise action on climate change, including the adoption of the first ever State Climate Change Policy.
- **Resourcing climate action** covers four types of ‘resources’: accurate information that is compelling and relevant; new finance; trained staff for whom climate action is a priority; and a broad constituency of credible and influential partners, partners. ACT consultants embedded within Pakistan's Climate Finance Unit (CFU) helped raise approximately \$140 million from different global funds since 2014.
- **Delivering climate action** involves institutions that can convene others and incentivise wider collaboration; partners with delivery reach; and processes that allow regular reflection to learn and adjust approaches. In Odisha, ACT is supporting an integrated planning framework on irrigation and agriculture with different departments, which is now being used for winter 'rabi' crop planning.

STRENGTHENING THE INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

ACT’s approach avoids any preconceived idea of a ‘correct’ institutional set-up. It focuses on improving institutional ‘functions’ to authorise, resource, and deliver adaptation , and on the key characteristics required to tackle climate change. ACT has learnt that there are several important considerations related to the design of the institutional architecture.

- **Overcoming the long-term uncertainty of climate change** requires autonomous technical agencies and a constituency of experts, to ensure that planning is less swayed by immediate politics. In Bihar, ACT has supported the local Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI) to become a formal knowledge partner for the Government, providing long-term and evidenced-based advice on adaptation.
- **Coordinating the complexity of climate change** requires incentives and opportunities for multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral collaboration. ACT supported the Government of Kerala in establishing a 90 member 'community of practice', from across different departments, which shares experiences of mainstreaming through email, social media, and in-person communication.
- **Tackling power asymmetry and resistance to action on climate change** by mandating overall responsibility to cross-sectoral, powerful agencies, and adopting clear lines of accountability. In Maharashtra, ACT has supported the government in establishing high-level oversight of the state’s Climate Change Policy, through the constitution of a parliamentary committee.
- **Managing the urgency, scale and equity of climate impacts** requires institutional responsibilities mandated through policy and legislation. For example, ACT supported the Government of Assam in establishing the Assam Climate Change Management Society (ACCMS) – a Special Purpose Vehicle coordinating action on climate change – which is accountable to the Chief Minister, but run by technical staff.



# Key Lessons from ACT's Experience:

## ACT's 10 lessons for delivering capacity building support to strengthen the systems of planning and delivery for adaptation:

**1. Have a strategy and schedule:** Any institutional capacity-building effort should be carefully and realistically planned. This includes having a shared vision with partners on what improvements in the functional performance are sought, based on a thorough assessment of the current context. Any intervention should have a realistic timeframe: reform processes take time and with climate change there are bigger capability challenges. ACT's experience shows that assumptions of linear change will often lead to disappointment.

**2. Learning and adaptive programming:** A capability required for managing climate risks is monitoring the effectiveness of adaptation actions. This includes tolerance of failure. Any capacity building programme should institutionalise this culture, and adopt an iterative process, with government partners, of monitoring risks and learning from successes and failures.

**3. Flexibility in results and measurement:** Donors require some certainty on the results they will see from their investment. Those delivering capacity building investments must predict a set of outcomes and then measure success against these. This can, however, reduce the space for responding to opportunities and changes in the context. ACT has learnt that it is valuable for donors to allow for adjustments in promised results, along with justifications and qualitative indicators to chart capacity building.

**4. Invest in 'influencing' and local teams:** ACT's most successful efforts have come through the engagement of local team members, in sustaining ownership of the government, building networks and shaping the debate. The management team has built and supported local teams, and now trusts their intuition to seize opportunities.

**5. Avoid technical bias when building climate change capabilities:** Providing information on climate change is not enough to change behaviour. To ensure dynamic and entrepreneurial institutions, it is important also to build leadership skills, to motivate people through reward structures, and to incentivise behaviour change.

**6. Expect resistance and diffuse opposition:** Action on climate change is politically challenging because it requires change in the values and norms governing decision-making. ACT has had success by starting with uncontested ideas, building trust, and then moving to the harder aspects of institutional climate capabilities.

**7. Inform and enable robust debate:** ACT has had success in producing accurate and trusted climate information, and using this to facilitate debate and ultimately help improve the quality of decisions made. It has proven particularly important to use local external organisations to carry out and communicate this analysis.

**8. Build a shared vision:** Government agencies have strong incentives to deliver results within short political timeframes. ACT's experience confirms that, when climate change can be aligned with existing political interests, processes and immediate priorities, significant institutional change is possible.

**9. Reshape interests:** ACT is demonstrating that interests can be changed through new evidence, new incentives and conscious agreements. ACT has supported the explicit competition of ideas and interests and the use of decision-making tools to help governments select the most appropriate.

**10. Build the constituency for delivering climate action:** Capacity-building efforts tend to focus solely on government partners, but a wider constituency of supportive non-government actors is important for building political commitment, providing expert advice and delivering adaptation.

*These and other lessons from the ACT programme are elaborated in the ACT learning paper: Building institutional capacity for enhancing resilience to climate change: An operational framework and insights from practice.*

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