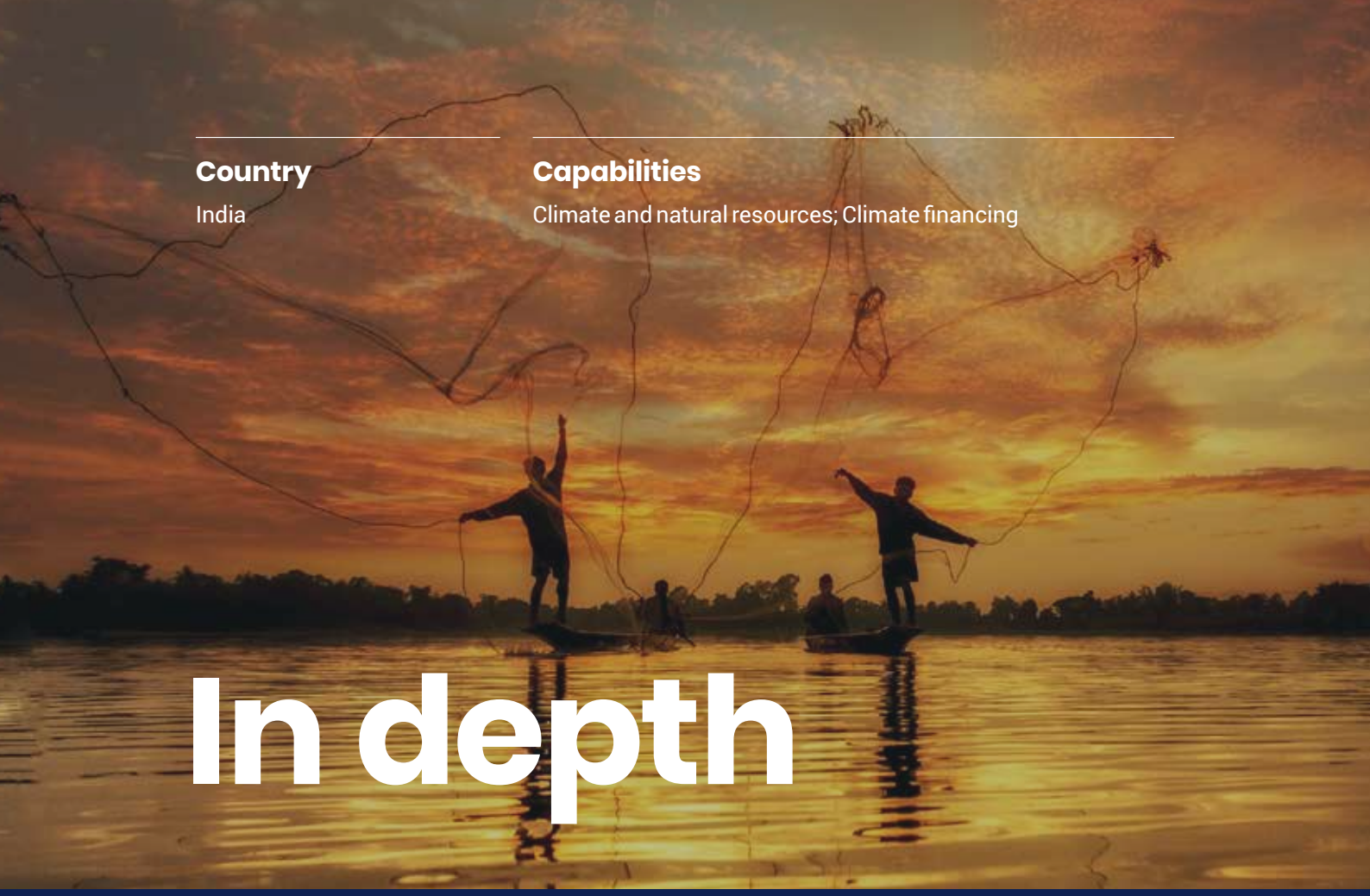

Country
India

Capabilities
Climate and natural resources; Climate financing

In depth

India's State Action Plans on Climate Change: towards meaningful action

India has embarked on the largest exercise in sub-national climate change planning in the world. All 29 states and seven union territories are preparing, or have completed, State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs). Despite some valid concerns about legitimacy and quality, the focus now needs to be on how to facilitate the implementation of these plans. This note highlights some of the issues that emerge from our ongoing support to six state governments and considers both the challenges to, and opportunities for, implementation.

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About Oxford Policy Management's *In depth* series

Our *In depth* publications aim to share detailed learning and analysis from our practical experiences working with governments, funders, practitioners, and partners to achieve lasting, positive change through policy reform.

Background

Key points

- While representing an impressive step forward on mainstreaming climate change within development planning in India, the SAPCCs have faced delays and challenges and the final plans still have some significant weaknesses.
- There are a number of obstacles to implementation connected to inadequate leadership, institutional barriers, the quality of the plans, and resource constraints.
- Ensuring effective and meaningful implementation of the plans will rely on a number of approaches, including: tackling the political economy of climate change; addressing institutional bottlenecks; moving towards investment-ready plans; and better leveraging available resources.

In 2008 the Government of India released its National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), providing the country with a blueprint for 'promot[ing] our development objectives while also yielding co-benefits for addressing climate change effectively'[1]. At the beginning of October 2015 the Government submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) – a pledge to cut the intensity of carbon emissions – to the UN ahead of the international climate change negotiations in Paris at the end of the year.

The federal structure of the country, however, means that states have primary responsibility for governing most of the sectors that are pivotal to addressing climate change, including natural resources, infrastructure and industries. As such, to implement the priorities in the NAPCC, sub-national climate change planning is required. India has been a first-mover in preparing SAPCCs, while other countries with similar structures – such as Indonesia, Pakistan and Kenya – are now following suit.

The SAPCCs are the product of a top-down process: in 2009 the Prime Minister of India asked all state governments to prepare a state plan that outlines how they will implement the national framework, taking into account vulnerabilities unique to their own states. Most states prepared their plans between 2010 and 2011, making use of consultants provided by development agencies. Despite the promise of central funding not having materialised, the central government is putting pressure on states to quickly finalise, adopt and start implementing the plans. Those invested in the process, including the development partners, are keen to make sure that this initiative has not been a wasted one.

While there are valid questions about quality and ownership, most stakeholders agree that the SAPCCs offer potential, as a 'door opener' for a more meaningful process of redirecting development planning and thinking towards climate resilience.[2]

[1] Government of India (2008), 'National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)'.

[2] Navroz K. Dubash and Anu Jogesh, 'From Margins to Mainstream? Climate Change Planning in India as a "Door Opener" to a Sustainable Future,' Centre for Policy Research: http://state-climate-plans.cprindia.org/uploads/2/3/7/5/23756750/from_margins_to_mainstream_9.7.14.pdf.

In focus: What are the SAPCCs?

The SAPCCs are a framework of action for responding to the effects of climate change in each state. The plans follow a uniform structure, setting out the unique vulnerabilities of the state in relation to a changing climate and the state government's approach for adapting to current and future impacts. Only a few of the states have carried out comprehensive vulnerability assessments in respect of climate change, and most have relied on national-level, or narrow sectoral, studies outlining current and expected impacts of climate change.

As directed by the central government, most SAPCCs are primarily concerned with adaptation, with a limited focus on mitigation of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – though some are accompanied by a GHG inventory and explore the potential of renewable energy and other clean technologies.

The plans outline the state's strategies for a range of sectors, including proposed actions and, in some cases, a timeline and budget for each. They tend to focus on those sectors that are important to the economy and local livelihoods, such as agriculture, water, transport, energy, industries, urban development, and forestry. Where actions have been identified, at best they are accompanied by an expected duration and a high-level estimate of total cost. In most cases the actions cover a one to five year period. The budget estimates vary significantly across states, with no consistent methodology being used.

Obstacles to implementation

Despite the central government regularly convening state nodal officials to provide updates on their plans, there is very little evidence regarding the extent to which implementation of these plans has actually commenced. In general, it appears that while some of the adaptation actions listed in the plans may be being implemented, this is likely to be more as a 'side-effect' of other pre-planned initiatives – for example the modification of an existing irrigation programme to increase its coverage. There are very few examples of a coordinated, monitored and concerted effort to implement the plan in any state.

There are a number of obstacles to implementation of the SAPCCs, which help explain why limited progress has been made to date:

Lack of leadership and political will

The SAPCCs were a top-down exercise, mandated by the central government as a necessary next step towards the NAPCC and as a means of demonstrating India's leadership on climate change. As a result, there was little immediate buy-in and ownership by the state governments, although after more than four years there has been some amount of institutionalisation. Some states already had some sort of climate change strategy or plan, and are therefore at a more advanced stage. In general, however, because the SAPCCs were not a 'home grown' exercise, there is limited political will to prioritise their implementation.

Furthermore, in most states, climate change is still largely seen as solely an environmental issue, rather than a risk to development. As such, responsibility to manage climate change is delegated to the Environment or Forestry Department. Senior bureaucrats and politicians understand to some extent that current and future impacts of climate change could threaten their primary goal of poverty reduction and economic growth, but as the effects are uncertain and difficult to manage, tackling climate change is not prioritised.

Lack of clear actions

The draft and final SAPCC documents vary considerably in terms of the amount of detail they contain, but most have certain similar weaknesses. They are in effect the state's 'statement of intent' regarding tackling climate change, providing a wish-list of actions for each department. In some cases these have been given a timeline, and budget estimates, but even when these exist they are not specific and clear enough to facilitate implementation.

An overarching problem of the documents is that the actions have not been sufficiently prioritised and sequenced so as to help identify those actions that should be included in annual development plans, and how. The SAPCCs attempt to be both strategic documents outlining the state governments' approach to tackling climate change, as well as action plans that can be directly implemented. In reality a number of additional steps are required to make the plans implementation-, or investment-, ready.

Little alignment with annual development plans and budgets

Even if the plans were 'implementation-ready', translating words into meaningful actions would rely on successful alignment with department-level policymaking and budgeting processes. In most cases the adaptation actions listed in the SAPCCs will be implemented by the relevant line department or agency. As such, each responsible department needs to include a set of actions within their annual development plan and budget. However, partly due to a lack of political will (see above) and partly due to capacity constraints, line departments are not routinely mainstreaming their SAPCC actions. It appears that only those adaptation actions that were already in a departments' plans, or on their agenda, are being funded.

This issue is compounded by the fact that the SAPCC process is led by the central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, and, as such, in most cases, the plans are housed within their nodal agency, usually either the Environment or Forestry Department, or Pollution Control Board. These departments have comparably limited authority within state governments, limiting their ability to put pressure on other departments to mainstream the SAPCC.

During the process of developing the SAPCCs, a number of institutional coordination mechanisms were put in place under the instructions of the central government. This usually included some form of steering committee formally chaired by the Chief Secretary or another senior official. In many states these structures remain and are expected to facilitate implementation. In most cases, however, these committees and structures meet infrequently and are more of a rubber stamp than an effective decision-making body. As a result, coordination across sectors is weak, which makes the process inefficient at best and risks misinterpretation and mal-adaptation at worst.

Resource constraints and uncertainty

State governments drafted the SAPCCs under the assumption that funding would materialise for implementation, either from central government or elsewhere. However, it is now expected that states will have to leverage existing sector development budgets. This uncertainty around funding sources compounds the problems presented by the other barriers to implementation.

Overcoming barriers to implementation

There are a number of opportunities and strategies for tackling these obstacles and kick-starting implementation of the SAPCCs. Our 'Action on Climate Today (ACT)' project is piloting a number of these:

Tackling the political economy of climate change

To ensure implementation of the SAPCCs climate change needs to be a political priority on the agenda of state political leaders and powerful departments like Planning and Finance. It is therefore important to understand the interests of these actors, and how to make a convincing argument to them regarding the fact that climate change is a critical risk factor for the state.

This would likely involve presenting climate change as a question of economics, and the risks and opportunities that action on climate change present for growth and development. Similarly, giving the problem a human dimension, and showing how climate change is affecting the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable in society, can be an effective strategy for communicating the issue. For example, a number of states are facing reoccurring droughts and crop failures due to changing monsoon patterns. This has given rise to the tragic situation of farmers committing suicide, which has been headline news for a number of years, and politicians have been forced to respond.

Climate change is a slow and incremental process and requires a long-term perspective, and, as such, politicians find it relatively easy to address more obvious requirements, such as building roads and boosting employment. Climate-related natural disasters, however, have an immediate impact, and there is wide acceptance and concern that they are happening more frequently and with more intensity across India. This therefore presents an opportunity to kick-start high-profile, state-level debates about whether, and how, to take action on climate change.

Who makes the argument for action on climate change is also important. In India, climate change is sometimes seen as an agenda for foreign governments, particularly within the debate on the country's responsibilities regarding controlling GHG emissions. As such, using local influential voices, such as technical experts, academics, civil society or the media, could be strategic. Building ownership and commitment of state leaders can also happen through exposure to best practices in other states where concrete benefits, and political gains, have come through action on climate change. As part of the ACT project we are using knowledge management to encourage experience sharing and peer review across six Indian states. For example, technical experts are helping the neighbouring Odisha and Chhattisgarh governments to study water availability patterns along the shared Mahanadi River. The next planned step is to facilitate a discussion between the two governments on learning from each other's successes and challenges in water management, but also – crucially – starting a discussion about how to collaborate.

Addressing the institutional bottlenecks

A number of states have built upon and expanded the institutional mechanisms established for developing the SAPCCs. This has usually involved institutionalising a steering committee as the highest level of decision-making, with the nodal department for the SAPCC acting as a de facto secretariat. There is a current trend, supported by central government funding opportunities, of creating climate change knowledge management cells within the nodal department. These cells are tasked with raising awareness on climate change and building capacity within the government and beyond. In a number of states the government is also nominating nodal officers within each of the key departments to act as a focal point for climate change, and to facilitate cross-sectoral communication and coordination. These are positive developments, which need to be further strengthened and shown to be both operational and delivering benefits.

Moving towards 'investment-ready' plans

Most state governments see their SAPCC as a living document, and there should be a process of regularly updating and refining the plan. In general, however, governments have not thought through or laid out the steps required to go from the SAPCC in its current form, to investment and implementation. A number of planning and financing processes are required, or would be useful, including: validation and prioritisation of actions within the SAPCC with the appropriate implementing entity; developing detailed project reports and/or proposing modifications to existing programmes and projects; and calculating detailed budgets. We are supporting each of the six state governments within the ACT programme in regard to carrying out these steps, focusing on the most critical adaptation issue for each state. For example, all governments have requested support to develop detailed project proposals for accessing both national and international sources of climate finance, which will provide the necessary extra capital to implement the priority adaptation actions in their plans.

> "Insights from our own work have shown that adopting a participatory, political economy-focused approach…can help ensure…greater sustainability of plans.

Leveraging the available resources

The central government has made it clear that there will be no substantial new funding for implementation of the SAPCCs, and that states should find available resources within the existing development budget.[3] State governments require support on how to identify opportunities to leverage existing resources, which will primarily mean 'climate proofing' development programmes and projects already underway. There are a number of tools that can be used to screen these programmes and identify how they can be altered or modified to take into account the impact of climate change, as well as build wider resilience. International climate finance could potentially cover additional costs of adaptation, and states need support in regard to accessing available finance. This includes preparing funding proposals, and building the capacity of implementing partners and technical staff for monitoring, reporting and verification.

[3] Navroz K. Dubash and Anu Jogesh, 'From Margins to Mainstream? Climate Change Planning in India as a "Door Opener" to a Sustainable Future," Centre for Policy Research: http://state-climate-plans.cprindia.org/uploads/2/3/7/5/23756750/from_margins_to_mainstream_9.7.14.pdf.

Case study:
ACT – the climate change innovation programme in India

The ACT programme, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and led by Oxford Policy Management, is supporting six state governments in India (Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Odisha and Maharashtra) as they move forward with the implementation of their SAPCCs. This includes providing technical assistance in relation to mainstreaming the SAPCC within development planning and budgeting, as well as in relation to accessing climate finance. This process starts with an appreciation of climate change loss and damage, and an assessment of the extent to which any action listed in the SAPCC could bring about climate change results.

The programme is piloting a simple methodology and process for carrying out this prioritisation process. It starts with an assessment of the relative importance of the intended climate change results, compared with sustainable development results. This is based on an assessment of climate change relevance (CC%), defined as (B-A)/B, where B is the expected results in the context of a changing climate and A is the expected results without climate change. This assessment is undertaken as part of the design of the action, to ensure that the implications of climate change have been understood and that the resources devoted to adaptation and mitigation are justified by reference to the scale of the climate change impact.

This process is being carried out in a participatory fashion, working through the evolving institutional structures, with a strong emphasis on building the awareness and ownership of the key line departments. While this work is facilitating the mainstreaming of climate change across sectors, the programme is also providing targeted and in-depth support to kick-start implementation of a number of priority adaptation issues, such as scaling-up climate smart agriculture, and water efficiency in industrial plants.

For example, Chhattisgarh is one of the poorest states in India and is vulnerable to a range of climate change impacts, particularly water scarcity. ACT is supporting the state government in strengthening its institutional capacity, systems and processes for adapting to current and future changes in temperature and rainfall patterns. It is also providing specific support to priority adaptation issues, including how to mainstream climate change within current watershed management programmes, and how to build incentives for efficiency in a number of sectors. In addition, the programme is supporting the establishment of a nodal agency to act as a hub for knowledge management on climate change, ensuring each department has the necessary information and knowledge about how its sector will be affected.

Conclusion

India has made impressive strides in its commitment towards tackling climate change. Much more work is needed, however, to ensure these commitments go beyond mere lip service. Translating words and intentions into actions that have a meaningful impact on emissions reduction and resilience-building will depend, almost entirely, on the ability of state governments to implement their action plans in a wholesale, coordinated way. Identifying the barriers to this implementation is the first step to overcoming them.

Insights from our own work have shown that adopting a participatory, political economy-focused approach that engages local agents and works within existing institutional structures can help ensure cost-efficiencies, local ownership and, ultimately, greater sustainability of plans. Similarly, by facilitating greater coordination between state governments we can share best practice and help build a blueprint for effective implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation actions in a variety of contexts, at both the national and sub-national level.

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Oxford Policy Management is committed to helping low- and middle- income countries achieve growth and reduce poverty and disadvantage through public policy reform. We seek to bring about lasting positive change using analytical and practical policy expertise. Through our global network of offices, we work in partnership with national decision makers to research, design, implement, and evaluate impactful public policy. We work in all areas of social and economic policy and governance, including health, finance, education, climate change, and public sector management. We draw on our local and international sector experts to provide the very best evidence-based support.

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