



CHAPTER 1

PEOPLE'S ADAPTATION PLANNING: PUTTING THE POOREST FIRST

KEY MESSAGES

- The Global Center on Adaptation is supporting vulnerable communities across eight African countries and 13 urban municipalities and villages in Bangladesh to map and understand local climate threats, assess local resources and capacities, and develop People's Adaptation Plans. These Plans aim to unlock larger and more sustainable financing streams, including from international financial institutions and national development budgets.
- Building on decades of local experience, the process enables communities to produce locally led, evidence-based, inclusive, and multisectoral plans that are aligned with government systems. Planning draws on locally generated, disaggregated data and integrates climate risk information from communities and experts.
- Community mobilizers are trained in both technical skills (such as data collection and mapping) and leadership skills (such as communicating about climate change, facilitating groups, and resolving conflicts).
- The data generated through household surveys seeks to make the invisible visible. It is owned by the communities, empowering them to negotiate priorities among themselves and with national and global funding partners.
- Key challenges include balancing the need for speed, scale, and long-term sustainability—particularly in integrating locally led adaptation processes into national systems, and strengthening local capacities to analyze data and design solutions.

Devolving Decision Making

Addressing Structural Inequalities

Investing in Local Capacities

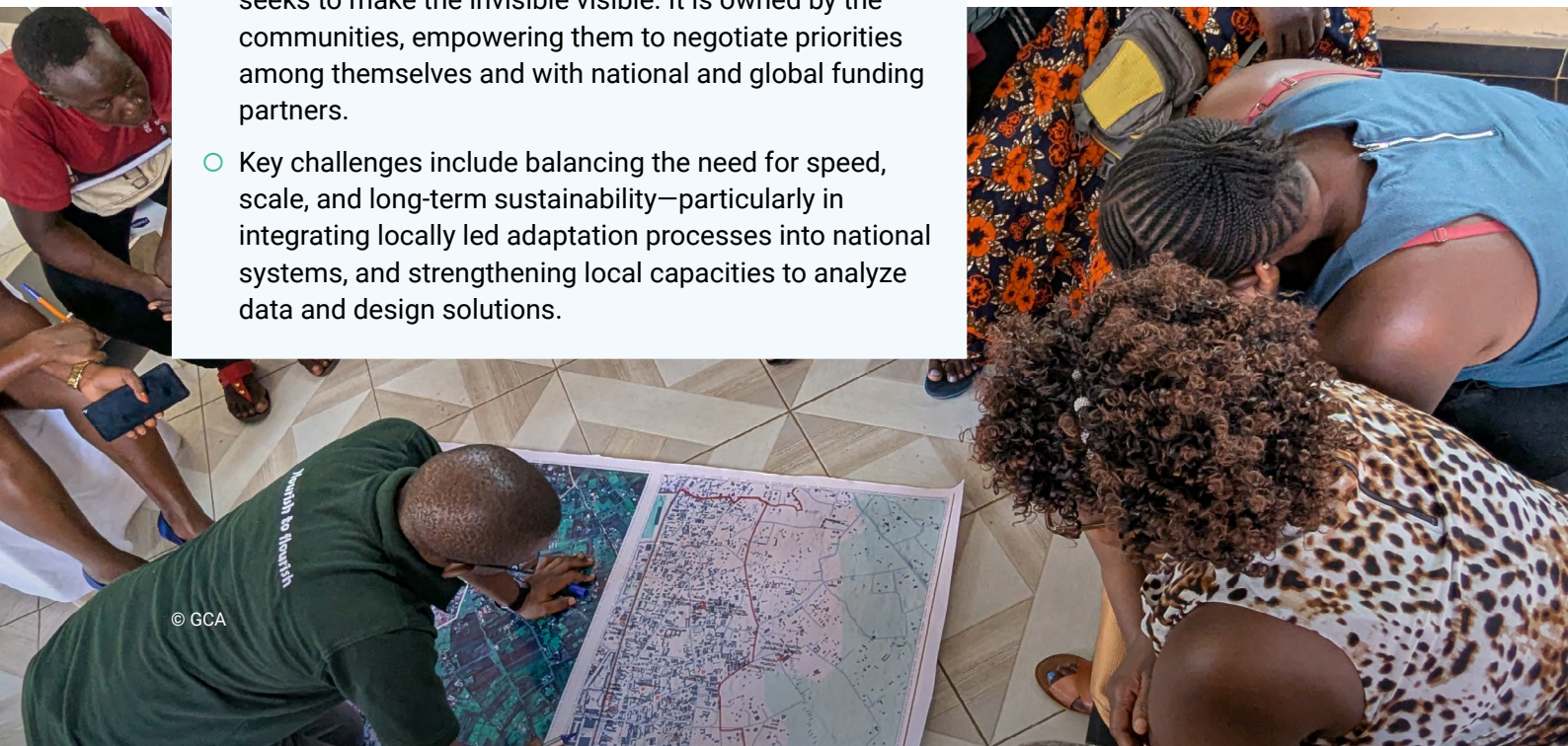
Building Understanding

Transparency and Accountability

Collaborative Action and Investment

IN THIS CHAPTER

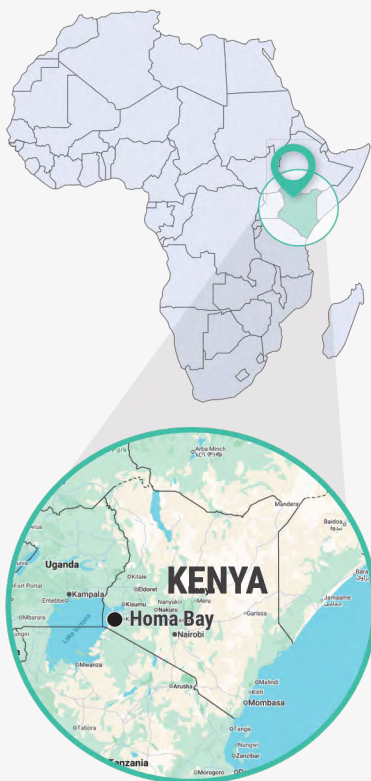
- Grounded in Evidence and Empathy
- The People's Adaptation Planning Process
- The Power of the Process
- Challenges and Lessons





Many of our communities were invisible before this process. Now we've mapped over 21,000 households across Homa Bay. That's not just data, that's power.

Mercy Lukio, a young resident of Sofia, an informal settlement in Homa Bay, Kenya



GROUNDING IN EVIDENCE AND EMPATHY

Life in Homa Bay County, on the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya, unfolds in a paradox of water abundance and scarcity. Frequent floods that destroy property and livelihoods are punctuated by prolonged dry spells that disrupt water availability and devastate incomes.

The poorest residents—nearly 30% of the County's population, living in informal settlements without access to basic services or risk-reducing infrastructure—are the hardest hit.⁵

"Only 14% of the residents of Homa Bay Municipality have access to piped water, even though we live on the edge of Lake Victoria, one of Africa's largest freshwater sources," says Mercy Lukio, a young resident of Sofia, an informal settlement in Homa Bay municipality. "People in informal settlements like mine pay KSh 600 to 1,200 (approximately €4–8) per month for water—five times more than what piped water users pay. That's the poverty penalty: we pay more for less, while at the same time suffering the consequences of floods, disease, lost income, and time poverty."

The African Development Bank's (AfDB) Kenya National Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Program aims to improve water and sanitation services across 21 urban areas in Kenya, including Homa Bay. At the behest of Homa Bay Governor, Gladys Wanga, and through the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program (AAP), the Global Center on Adaptation (GCA) is working to make the project's investments more climate responsive and better aligned with the needs of vulnerable communities.

GCA is supporting residents of Homa Bay's informal settlements, in partnership with the County Government, to map and understand how climate change is affecting their lives and livelihoods; prioritize adaptation needs; and secure funding (including from the AfDB project) to implement solutions to reduce climate vulnerability.

Informal settlements are rarely included in formal urban planning, despite their high vulnerability to climate change and other risks.⁶ Governments seldom collect data on population size, service access, or exposure to risks, leaving residents largely invisible in official records. These gaps fuel climate vulnerability.



To close this gap in Homa Bay, GCA's local partner [Akiba Mashinani Trust](#) (AMT), a pioneer in locally led planning, supported residents of the three informal settlements in the Municipality (Shauri Yako, Sofia, and Makongeni) to collect their own data and map their communities on paper and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).

Household surveys and mapping were conducted by 382 community members who were trained in surveying, mapping, numbering, and data collection using GIS-enabled tools. These "community mobilizers" covered a total of 21,317 households across 12 sublocations, involving 50,655 residents. While gathering data on socioeconomic conditions and climate vulnerabilities through a purpose-built questionnaire on KoboToolbox, they explained climate change to each household and invited them to join the planning process.

Support in using the GIS tools and analyzing the data was provided by 20 county officials and 40 students from the local Tom Mboya University, who were trained in using digital and geospatial tools and data analysis. An additional 23 students were embedded in county offices as interns to support the planning process.

"Many of our communities were invisible before this process. Now we've mapped over 21,000 households across Homa Bay. That's not just data, that's power," said Mercy, one of the trained community co-researchers, at a high-level gathering in Nairobi.

"We went door-to-door in underserved settlements like Sofia and Makongeni collecting real data on flood exposure, drainage problems, waste buildup, and lack of services. We combined mobile tools, local knowledge, and lived experience of climate change. We worked with university students to translate field data into digital maps and risk layers using GIS. This partnership between community youth and student mappers created an ecosystem of innovation that turned the informal settlements into visible, mappable, and plannable spaces. This is locally led adaptation in action. It's community-owned. Youth-driven. And it's deeply grounded in both evidence and empathy."



Homa Bay Governor Gladys Wanga visits constituents, alongside GCA President and CEO Professor Patrick V. Verkooijen, in Shauri Yako Informal Settlement, Homa Bay Municipality, Kenya.



What makes this process truly groundbreaking is that it put the poorest and most vulnerable communities, including youth and women, at the center.

Gladys Wanga, Homa Bay Governor, Kenya

Recognizing that Homa Bay Municipality does not have a land-use plan, Governor Wanga requested that the planning process inform the development of an integrated climate change and development plan. A formal notice of intention to plan was issued at the start of the process, as required by Kenya's Physical and Land Use Planning Act of 2021, ensuring a formal status for the plan, and enabling access to national funding sources for implementation.

The outcome, *The People's Adaptation—Local Physical and Land Use Development Plan for Homa Bay Municipality 2025-2035*, was released for public comment during Kenya's Devolution Conference in August 2025. This landmark Plan—the first integrated, climate-resilient Local Physical and Land Use Development Plan in Kenya—will:

- Guide AfDB's climate-resilient water and sanitation investments in Homa Bay.
- Steer other development spending towards climate resilience.
- Put the needs of the poor and vulnerable at the center of decision-making.

"What makes this process truly groundbreaking is that it put the poorest and most vulnerable communities, including youth and women, at the center," said Governor Wanga, during an [event](#) in Nairobi. "We did not speak for the people. We worked with them to define their vision of a climate resilient future."

The costs of adapting to climate change are soaring, while adaptation finance flows are shrinking. The stakes could not be higher: scarce resources must now deliver maximum impact to those who need them most.

Leaving No One Behind

To direct adaptation finance to those who need it most and ensure it delivers maximum impact at the community level, however, multiple questions must first be tackled:

- Who needs adaptation support most urgently?
How can the most climate-vulnerable households or individuals within a community be identified, particularly in data-poor environments where they may be rendered invisible?
- Which actions or solutions should take priority, in the face of extremely limited resources?



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Community meeting in Maizpara colony, Chattogram City Corporation, Bangladesh

- How can existing resources—not just funds, but also institutions, processes, and capacities—be leveraged for timely, effective, and scaled-up adaptation?
- How can capacity and institutional gaps at the frontlines of climate impacts be plugged so responses can be urgent and truly responsive to local needs?
- How can existing funding sources be channeled to locally identified adaptation priorities, and be used efficiently and effectively?
- How can the effectiveness and efficiency of adaptation interventions be tracked? And how can progress on resilience be measured meaningfully, in ways that also inform course-correction by local actors if adaptation efforts fall short?

The [Principles for Locally Led Adaptation](#) (LLA) offer a powerful answer. Developed under the guidance of the Global Commission on Adaptation, and based on the well-established principle of subsidiarity and decades of development experience, they call for these decisions to be made at the lowest effective level of governance, closest to those directly affected. They provide a practical, actionable roadmap to ensure that resources reach the frontlines, and the most affected determine how they are used, within a fairer framework of mutual accountability.

A deeply contextualized understanding of climate change impacts by those affected is a first step for local determination of adaptation needs, priorities, and solutions. How will climate impacts be experienced by an individual, a household, or a community? Which individual or household within a community is more vulnerable to these impacts? What does resilience to climate change look like for this individual, household or community? What resources, capacities, or institutions exist locally to achieve resilience, and what more is necessary? What has already been tried, that can be built upon? How does this inform what works and what doesn't?

These are questions that individuals, households, and communities, together with their local governments, are best placed to answer.

GCA is currently supporting poor communities in eight countries in Africa and 13 urban municipalities and villages in Bangladesh to map and understand local climate threats; take stock of local resources and capacities; and develop People's Adaptation Plans. The



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Plans aim to unlock larger and more sustainable funding streams—including from national development budgets and investments from international financial institutions such as AfDB, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

This “retrofitting” of a locally led planning process into traditional funding channels seeks to overcome multiple challenges in the current adaptation funding landscape:

- Its predominantly top-down nature, which often misses the mark.
- Difficulties in channeling climate finance to the local level.
- Fragmentation of adaptation and development funding through multiple channels and through projectization and sectorization, resulting in inefficiencies in spending.
- Additional demands on already limited technical and financial capacities at the local level to meet complex funder requirements.

The People’s Adaptation Planning process focuses on equipping climate-vulnerable communities with the knowledge, data, and skills they need to understand local risks; and to work with governments and technical experts to develop contextualized solutions. The responsibility to fund these evidence-based adaptation plans in a coordinated way must then rest with governments and, critically, with those most responsible for driving climate change.

THE PEOPLE’S ADAPTATION PLANNING PROCESS

The People’s Adaptation Planning process builds on decades of experience from the Muungano wa Wanavijiji federation, an affiliate of Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and AMT. Documented in the GCA guide *Locally Led Planning: A Guide for Building Climate Resilience in Urban Informal Settlements*, the process is defined by three core features:

- **Locally led, evidence-based, and inclusive:** Planning is driven by community members, in partnership with government and non-government organizations. The process is inclusive down to the household level, with each household consulted on vulnerabilities and priorities. The planning relies on locally generated, disaggregated data (gender, age, disability) and is complemented by climate risk information from meteorological, research, and scientific institutions.
- **Multisectoral:** The community identifies key sectors of importance to them, and then the planning process ensures coordination across those sectors and institutions (government, non-government, and research) for coordinated rather than fragmented decision-making and investments. For example, infrastructure planning for roads, sewers, water pipes, and waste management must be coordinated for effective flood control.
- **Aligned with government systems:** Local government engagement is central, along with existing formal and informal governance structures and institutions. Where possible, Plans are aligned or integrated with national and local strategies, including development plans, land use plans, and urban masterplans.

GCA initiates the process by identifying suitable early-stage projects from International Financial Institutions (IFIs)—such as the World Bank, AfDB and ADB—or from bilateral



agencies like Agence Française de Développement. These projects must have potential to invest in building resilience in poor communities. Starting here helps ensure financing for priority adaptation actions identified in People's Adaptation Plans. Projects may have a broad focus (e.g., social inclusion, urban, or coastal resilience) or a sector-specific focus (e.g., water and sanitation services for the poor).

Next, GCA engages IFI project teams and target country governments to ensure the Plans add value—by piloting the approach for scaling across a project or by focusing on particularly climate-vulnerable settlements. Where scaling is pursued, GCA also develops training manuals and capacity-building for implementation teams.

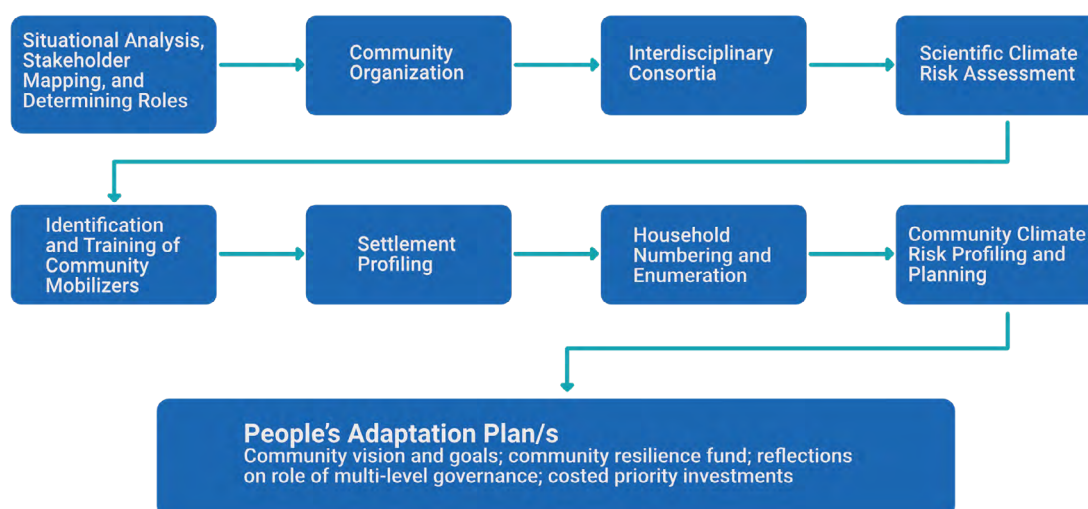
Local partners—national or grassroots organizations with community trust and presence—are then identified through a public call. Once onboarded, they adapt the process to local contexts with community input, while upholding the three core features outlined above. The key steps proposed for the planning process are described below.

Situational Analysis, Stakeholder Mapping, and Determining Roles

The situational analysis includes a review of national and local legal, institutional, and social (formal and informal) frameworks, to ensure synergies and compliance. In Homa Bay, the Senegal River Valley, and in Zambia, a policy and institutional analysis first identified opportunities to integrate LLA into existing frameworks, including local development plans and National Adaptation Plans.

In addition to seeking the buy-in and engagement of relevant stakeholders in the planning process, this step convenes expertise and leadership to drive the planning process and defines roles and responsibilities. Key actors are identified (from within communities, local government, civil society, academia, and the private sector) to provide leadership, sector knowledge, and technical expertise. Leadership by vulnerable groups is prioritized.

FIGURE 1. The People's Adaptation Planning Process





Young people play a key role in supporting their communities to understand climate risks, including in Mirsarai, Bangladesh, where their plans will inform investments in an AIIB project on Smart Cities.

Community Organization

This step establishes reliable and inclusive platforms for community participation, if not already in existence. The exact nature of community organization is decided by the local partner in consultation with the communities and local government, building on existing community organization frameworks (such as self-help groups, cooperatives, and sectoral committees).

Community organization is important to multiple phases of the process, including planning, implementation, and maintenance of new infrastructure and services. This representation system is useful for several activities, including:

- Mobilizing residents to participate in the planning process, and coordinating mobilization, educational, and planning meetings.
- Communicating about planning activities with residents within their subgroups, and with local government.
- Discussing key challenges, relative priorities, and preferred solutions.
- Forming and validating plans across sectors.
- Creating local changemakers and empowering residents, in particular women and youth, to engage in mobilization efforts, data collection activities, and horizontal learning exchanges with other communities.
- Building new local expertise so that residents can plan for themselves instead of relying on outside experts.

In Zambia, for instance, a People's Adaptation Planning process, launched to inform investments by a World Bank project, first sought to engage local leaders (including traditional chiefs and elders) and conducted a Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process for Indigenous Peoples and communities to grant or deny consent to initiate a planning process that includes discussions on rights to land and resources.



Interdisciplinary Consortia

The formation of consortia on key thematic areas identified by the community allows sector experts to contribute their specialized knowledge and provide additional capacity for local government departments. Each sectoral consortium (for instance, on climate resilience, agriculture, water management, or land tenure) includes government, civil society, and private sector experts, ideally led by staff from a corresponding local government department. Core tasks for consortia include:

- Filling sectoral data gaps with community co-researchers.
- Preparing sector plans that reflect the needs and aspirations of residents, and their negotiations in community planning forums.
- Harmonizing across sectors for an integrated final plan.

Scientific Climate Risk Assessment

GCA's local partner engages a local or national university, institution or expert to identify, assess and map climate exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity of a specific area, population, or sector to climate-related hazards. In addition to building local capacity to conduct scientific climate risk assessments, this step seeks to establish a working relationship between local governments, communities, and local or national research institutions, including meteorological services, to inform and complement community-led climate risk profiling.

Where this capacity does not exist locally, national or global technical experts support local experts to develop the climate risk assessments. In Homa Bay, for instance, GCA contracted an international consulting firm to build the capacity of the county government and the local Tom Mboya University to conduct such assessments, through learning-by-doing and capacity-building workshops.



Key stakeholders—including representatives from climate-vulnerable communities, Chattogram City Corporation, and Chattogram Water Supply and Sewerage Authority—endorsed the locally led planning process during the inception meeting held in June 2024 in Chattogram.

Identification and Training of Community Mobilizers

Community mobilizers are recruited from all stakeholder groups, in particular the most marginalized groups (tenants, women, youth, people living with disability) but also groups with vested business interests in the status quo (slum owners and informal service providers). They are trained in technical skills such as data collection and mapping, and in leadership skills such as communicating climate change, group facilitation, and conflict resolution.

The training of community mobilizers builds capacity within the community for iterative adaptation planning and implementation and is an investment in their capacities so that they can become its champions, working together to steward the process through challenges. It also builds on the trust that exists within the community; provides opportunities for marginalized stakeholders to take on leadership roles; and is more cost effective than relying on more expensive outsiders and experts.

Settlement Profiling

An initial broad profiling of settlements by the community mobilizers provides a broad understanding of different climate-related risks and challenges faced by residents. This step is particularly helpful in identifying settlements that are more vulnerable to climate change, when limited funding necessitates such prioritization.

For instance in Chattogram, Bangladesh, where GCA is supporting a World Bank water and sanitation project, GCA's local partners, WaterAid Bangladesh and Dushtha Shasthya Kendra, first profiled all the low income communities (LICs) in the 17 wards of the city. Secondary data gathered during the situational analysis had indicated 125 LICs, but the profiling revealed that only 106 remained—the others had been evicted or relocated. Trained community mobilizers then engaged with the residents of the 106 LICs—particularly women, youth, and marginalized groups—collecting spatial and socioeconomic data on climate vulnerabilities, land tenure challenges, and local adaptation practices. Researchers from the Chattogram University of Engineering and Technology then developed climate vulnerability and risk indices from the data. The outcome of this process guided the World Bank towards prioritizing investments in climate-vulnerable LICs.

Household Numbering and Enumeration

This step is the core of the People's Adaptation Plan process. Informal settlements, both urban and rural, are generally data-poor environments. Even data that exists is not always up to date, or reflective of community experience. During this step, therefore, the trained community mobilizers use a purpose-built questionnaire to gather data related to climate vulnerability from the community. They use software like KoboToolbox for data collection, which allows geotagging of the data. They also number and record each structure in the settlement, including houses and public infrastructure like water points, toilets, roads, and drains.

This data is analyzed, usually by the local university or expert collaborating on the climate risk assessment, and brought back to the community and local government. There, it serves as the foundation for evidence-based decision-making by the community, targeting of scarce investments to those most in need, and accuracy in service delivery planning and policy formulation. Critically, it supports the community and local government in identifying the



most vulnerable households and at-risk populations, such as women-headed households and informal workers with livelihoods at risk, and in prioritizing their needs.

In Homa Bay and in Feni, Bangladesh, where GCA is working with AIIB to ensure the inclusion of poor citizens in the design of smart cities, this process unveiled disparities between existing sources, as families had relocated in or out of the settlements.



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Community members participate in a sensitization meeting in Masaiti District, Copperbelt Province, Zambia, where the Plan will inform investments in a World Bank forest management project.

Community Climate Risk Profiling and Planning

The analyzed data from the enumeration process is brought back to the community for validation, and, along with the scientific climate risk assessment, guides the next step of iterative community climate risk profiling. This information supports diverse community groups to rank climate risks, diagnose impacts, evaluate potential solutions, and assess opportunities and barriers. The diverse community groups reflect the full range of experiences within the community, including diversity in age, gender, social, cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds, geographic locations, and levels of vulnerability.

Iterative sessions, informed also by inputs from the sectoral consortia, support a process of community visioning of climate resilience and setting of immediate and future goals. The result of this process is a list of costed priority interventions for investment, identified and validated by the community, together with their local government.

THE POWER OF THE PROCESS

The People's Adaptation Planning process generates the evidence and information a community needs to explore and understand local impacts of climate change on aspects of their lives that are important to them. This evidence supports them to negotiate—within the



Climate change is intensifying the competition for access to the Senegal River between pastoralists and fisherfolk, as inland ponds used by livestock dry up earlier in the year. A new jetty planned for fisherfolk will reduce access for livestock to just one point in the River. The planning process was the first opportunity for us to sit together to discuss solutions that will work for both.

Abdoulaye Sow, Pastoralists representative and Member of Council in Bakel, Senegal, where the planning process was piloted for the World Bank's *Projet de Développement et de Résilience Communautaire dans la Vallée du Fleuve Sénégal* (Community Resilience and Development Project in the Senegal River Valley).

community and with providers of finance—which needs, and whose needs, should be prioritized.

Integrated Plan

Many of the climate vulnerabilities of the informal settlements of the poor, urban, and rural stem from either the lack of spatial, socioeconomic, and environmental planning, or from exclusion from planning. Unplanned, fragmentary, project- and sector-based responses to these vulnerabilities tend to be insufficient, inefficient, and ineffective. The opportunity to plan is essential for communities, leaders, and governments to make decisions on the use of resources, capital, and land. After all, that is why planned approaches are legally mandated by governments.

Planned approaches become even more important when difficult decisions need to be made, for instance on how scarce resources can address the development needs of today, but also the climate-resilience needs of the future. Should a sewer or drainage system cater only for current population and rainfall data, or should additional investments be made, to cater for a higher population and more rainfall?

For members of the community, the opportunity for locally led adaptation planning is also an opportunity to truly understand and internalize how climate change will impact their lives, and who will be the worst impacted. It is an opportunity for them to negotiate with each other on whose needs or which needs should be prioritized, and why.

A planned approach to adaptation in each community also ensures that there are long-term goals and a vision of climate resilience, defined by the community on their own terms, that can continue to guide investments from fragmented sources, towards a more integrated path. It offers an opportunity to take stock of, and record, the resources, infrastructure, and capacities that already exist, so investments build on them, rather than duplicate previous efforts.

Locally Grounded, Evidence-Based

The process ensures that planning starts with accurate, locally generated data and information. The data collected by community mobilizers, through enumerations, participatory mapping, and risk profiling aims to ensure



that no person or household remains unseen. Communities own the data and therefore trust that it reflects their current up-to-date local realities better than infrequent national censuses. It ensures that community prioritization of action is based on evidence, reducing the risk of wasted or misdirected investments, and that new efforts build on existing infrastructure. For instance, in Homa Bay, it ensured that trunk infrastructure for water or sewage is not underutilized because no record of it exists.

The data also becomes an important baseline to track progress on reducing climate vulnerability and building resilience in future. It offers a more meaningful and locally grounded way of tracking progress on local, national, or global goals on adaptation, and reduces the risk of obfuscation through aggregation. It could make the [Global Goal on Adaptation](#) more meaningful, for instance by supporting robust baselines, clear priorities, and measurable outcomes at the local level.

Where communities consent (for instance in Narayanganj, Bangladesh, where GCA is supporting People's Adaptation Plans to inform city masterplans, or in other locations where GCA is supporting the development of pro-poor "climate-smart cities" for an AIIB project) the data they generate is integrated into government databases to create a more up-to-date and comprehensive resource for formal planners, which includes the previously invisible.

Inclusive Decision-Making

The house-to-house enumeration ensures that every household within a community is informed of the planning process, made aware of the risks of climate change, and given the opportunity to engage.



© GCA

Community mobilizers map Ringiti Island, Homa Bay County, Kenya

It ensures that the data collected is disaggregated, reflecting and confronting household and individual vulnerability (for instance, of gender or age groups, or low-income or marginalized households). This brings to life the core principle of “leaving no one behind” within the community.

Marginalized groups like women and youth play a central role in the process as data collectors, mobilizers, and facilitators. They are trained, including in leadership skills, to create a cadre of local champions who can continue to act as advocates and watchdogs.

Embedded in National and Local Systems

The buy-in and engagement of national and local government agencies, and the use of existing governance systems and institutions, is a prerequisite for the planning process. The situational analysis and stakeholder mapping identifies existing formal and informal groups and committees including for instance statutory groups like disaster management committees or resource management committees, and informal self-help groups, for engagement in the process.

Where possible (for instance in Homa Bay) the planning process goes beyond its mandate of supporting an IFI project, to support the integration of locally led approaches into formal planning processes. Following national legal guidelines, like the notification of an intention to plan in Homa Bay, gives the planning process greater legitimacy and more access to funding.

In several municipalities in Bangladesh, for instance, the Plans empowered community members to negotiate with their local governments to fund implementation through Annual Development Plan (ADP) budgets. In Mongla in Bangladesh, for instance, the communities secured €2,56,354 from the ADP budget, while in Chattogram, communities raised €17,52,394. In Narayanganj, the People’s Adaptation Plans are set to influence investments into urban Masterplans.

In Rwanda and in Zambia, meanwhile, the planning process is informing guidelines for the integration of adaptation into local development planning processes—District Development Strategies in Rwanda, and Integrated Development Plans for districts in Zambia.

Empowering Communities to Negotiate

Equipped with robust data and collectively agreed priorities, communities are also better able to negotiate with local and national governments, donors, and IFIs for more robust infrastructure that can withstand climate shocks. In Patuakhali, Bangladesh, for instance, communities used the Plan to convince the local government to invest in a road to mitigate some of the impacts of flooding on the community. The road is elevated and has wider drainage, to deal better with flooding due to storms and cyclones.

Over time, the Plans have the potential to shift the dynamic from fund providers dictating priorities to communities actively shaping and securing investments.

Building Institutional Capacity and Sustainability

At every level and stage of the planning process, opportunities to institutionalize capacity and to support peer-to-peer learning for locally led adaptation are supported, either through direct



support to the IFI projects (for instance in Ghana, Cameroon, and Central African Republic) or the activities of the [Global Hub on LLA](#). The approach recognizes that capacity-building on LLA is necessary for all actors, from IFI staff to national and local governments, and academic and research institutions. Meanwhile, communities (and local governments) are more likely to benefit from learning exchanges with their peers.

The local climate risk assessments that supplement community data collection as part of the planning process are conducted by local universities—many of which have not conducted such assessments before. The capacity of such local and national institutions to respond to local information needs is supported. Where possible (for instance in Zambia and in Homa Bay) local governments and partners are encouraged to sign MoU's with local universities to institutionalize the process of universities supporting adaptation planning by local governments and communities.

Capacity-building initiatives for project implementation teams (including national and local government staff) are also supported by GCA. These include an online [Masterclass on Locally Led Adaptation](#) and in-person, nationally contextualized training on LLA. In Senegal, for instance, GCA developed a sub-project manual laying out the methodologies for locally led planning, and subsequently trained project management units (including regional and local governments, and civil society organizations) in its implementation.

Meanwhile, the Global Hub on LLA delivers targeted and institutionalized capacity-building for national and local government staff outside of direct project support, building on the learning from the People's Adaptation Planning processes. For instance, GCA is supporting the faculty of the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Center (BPATC) to develop LLA training modules for national and local public administrators, drawing on GCA's experience in locally led adaptation planning in Bangladesh. Both senior and junior public administrators from all sectors and ministries, mandated to go back to BPATC at various stages of their career, will receive this training.



Community enumerators conducting the household mapping and survey exercise, Ringiti Island, Homa Bay County, Kenya



© Abu Nayeem Md. Shakib, BRAC

A woman collects vegetables from her garden beside the community pond in Narikeltola, Bangladesh, where GCA is supporting a People's Adaptation Plan to inform investments in a coastal resilience project.

Communities are also supported to learn from each other, to foster adaptation innovation and solidarity across cities and regions. The community from Mongla in Bangladesh [visited](#) Patuakhali, for example, and inspired the creation of a community operations and maintenance fund. Residents of informal settlements in Mumbai, India, advised the residents of Mongla to target local government budgets, and to organize in federations, for collective advocacy and learning. Communities also share information on specific adaptation responses, such as the maintenance of roadside vegetation to reduce flood risk and recharge aquifers.

Critically, women and youth from within the community are trained as enumerators, mappers, facilitators, and leaders. In some cases, as in Mirsarai in Bangladesh, governments have expressed their intention to formalize the role of the trained community mobilizers in supporting locally led efforts. Such initiatives could, in the future, translate to adaptation job opportunities for women and young people in supporting the climate resilience of their communities.

Finally, GCA supports peer-to-peer learning [between the local partner organizations](#) who facilitate the planning process, with the intention of supporting collaboration instead of the multiplication of methodologies that all seek to achieve the same end (such as methodologies for community engagement or organization, or for community-led climate vulnerability risk assessments). "By aligning GCA's locally led planning process with WaterAid's Participatory Ward Vulnerability Assessment (PWVA) guidelines, we co-created a process that strengthened community leadership and bridged science and local knowledge," says Partha Hefaz Shaikh, Director of Program and Policy Advocacy, WaterAid Bangladesh. "The emphasis on inclusivity, evidence, and shared learning has been invaluable, and we're already carrying these lessons into our broader policy and advocacy work."

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS



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Over the past four years, GCA's support for People's Adaptation Plans in Africa and Bangladesh has revealed a number of challenges and generated valuable insights.

Balancing Speed, Scale, and Sustainability

A major challenge lies in navigating the tension between speed, scale, and long-term sustainability. Building genuine community understanding and ownership, and ensuring alignment with national and local systems, is a time-intensive process. However, this process often faces time constraints—either due to limited planning budgets or the tight timelines of IFI projects that these plans aim to influence.

These constraints can restrict activities, such as house-to-house surveys, which are crucial for understanding climate threats; enabling evidence-based, multisectoral planning; identifying the most vulnerable; empowering communities; and establishing resilience baselines to monitor progress.

Ideally, locally led adaptation planning should be mainstreamed in countries with established governance, legal, institutional, and fiduciary systems that support decentralization. Rather than being driven by individual projects, communities and local governments should be supported to undertake locally led adaptation planning as part of a continuous development planning cycle. These Plans could then inform national and local government investments and attract funding from external adaptation finance sources.

As an initial step, the People's Adaptation Plans developed with GCA's support will be made available through the [Global Hub on Locally Led Adaptation](#). This will help adaptation finance providers align their investments with community-identified priorities. Anonymized data collected through the process will also be shared—with community consent—to ensure future adaptation efforts can build on existing plans, data, and community capacity.

Need for Technical Support

While communities are central to identifying adaptation priorities, not all solutions lie within their immediate control. Some require collaboration with technical experts—for example, designing climate-resilient, affordable housing—while others depend on systemic action at sub-national or national levels, such as infrastructure development or policy reform.

To bridge this gap, GCA is piloting Women's Adaptation Labs, inspired by the [Roof Over Our Heads](#) (ROOH) campaign. These Labs bring in technical expertise to co-develop solutions with communities. One such initiative involves supporting women in Bangladesh to design “green roads for water” under a World Bank rural roads project. These roads are designed to facilitate water flow, benefiting agriculture and households, while also reducing flood-related damage to infrastructure.

At the same time, situational analyses within the planning process are being strengthened to better identify drivers of climate vulnerability that require government intervention.

Enhancing Data Use and Local Capacity

The planning process continues to evolve, shaped by local contexts, previous experiences, and learning from other initiatives shared via the Global Hub on LLA. For example, GCA works with local partners to adapt household survey questionnaires to capture context-specific vulnerabilities, including those related to migration, social protection, and access to finance.

However, longer surveys produce more complex, disaggregated data that require enhanced analytical capacity. Many local partners, including collaborating universities, may lack the resources or skills to analyze this data effectively or translate it into meaningful narratives for communities. To address this, GCA is promoting peer learning as a strategy to strengthen local analytical capabilities.

Integrating with National Systems Requires Sustained Support

There is strong interest from governments in embedding this planning approach into national systems. However, meaningful integration demands sustained support beyond individual project cycles. For instance, Rwanda's Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA) is actively exploring how to scale up this approach through the national District Development Planning process. While pilot efforts in two districts are complete, further support is needed for policy review, institutionalization, and capacity-building of LODA staff. Traditional project-based models do not provide the long-term engagement necessary for systemic change. In response, GCA is redesigning its next phase—AAP 2.0—to better support strategic opportunities for influencing national systems and enabling lasting transformation.