



# Knowledge as currency: Generating and disseminating knowledge for climate change adaptation in Africa

The **African Climate Change Fellowship Program (ACCFP)** offers experiential learning, education, research and training opportunities to African professionals, researchers, educators and graduate students. These opportunities enhance their capacities for advancing and applying knowledge for climate change adaptation in Africa. For more information, visit [www.start.org](http://www.start.org) and [www.accfp.org](http://www.accfp.org).

The **AfricaAdapt Network** is a continent-wide knowledge-sharing platform that facilitates the flow of climate change adaptation knowledge between researchers, policymakers, civil society and vulnerable communities. For more information, visit [www.africa-adapt.net](http://www.africa-adapt.net).

**START (the global change SysTem for Analysis, Research and Training)** is an international non-profit organization that promotes research driven capacity-building to advance knowledge and inspire action on global environmental change. For more information, visit [www.start.org](http://www.start.org).

The **Climate Change Adaptation in Africa (CCAA)** program seeks to improve the ability of African countries to adapt to climate change in ways that benefit the most vulnerable by building African expertise on adaptation to meet the needs of African communities, decision-makers and institutions. For more information, visit [www.idrc.ca](http://www.idrc.ca).

It is widely recognized that there is a gap between the people who produce the scientific knowledge that informs adaptation and the people who need and apply that knowledge. Knowledge generation for the sake of generation alone is inadequate. New knowledge has the potential to inspire new ideas as well as inform new interpretations of existing knowledge and experiences. This, in turn, has the potential to influence decisions and actions – including climate risk management, adaptation and sustainable development. It is imperative that knowledge that is generated through research be translated into clear messages and shared with the people who need it in relevant, timely and usable ways. Pathways and mechanisms must also be developed that nurture more demand-driven research initiatives. The complexity of and urgent need for adaptation planning leaves no room for a one-size-fits all approach. Overcoming these and other challenges demands collaborative action that moves science forward to change society.

**In December 2011**, six representatives of the African Climate Change Fellowship Program (ACCFP) participated in the UNFCCC Conference of Parties 17 (COP17) in Durban, South Africa. The COP17 was hosted by the Government of South Africa and brought together thousands of representatives from international communities of science, government, civil society and others with the goal of discussing and advancing implementation of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol as well as the Bali Action Plan and Cancun Agreements. Although participation in formal negotiations of the COP was restricted to national delegations, a series of activities, ranging from formally recognized COP side events to informal café-style dinner discussions, were organized throughout the two-week period. These interactive activities, intended to inform the ongoing negotiations, created a landscape in which COP participants shared their knowledge and experiences. Participants networked with one another to advance collaborative efforts for future climate change research, education and training activities.

Within this landscape, the ACCFP, together with AfricaAdapt, START and the Climate Change Adaptation in Africa (CCAA) program, organized a joint event entitled, *Knowledge as currency: Generating and disseminating knowledge for climate change adaptation in Africa*. The goal of the event was to bring together a diverse group of

scientists, policymakers and practitioners to review experiences from both the ACCFP and AfricaAdapt that showcased innovative processes for generating and sharing knowledge to inspire and advance local adaptation actions. The event provided a platform for facilitated discussion between COP participants and members of the ACCFP and AfricaAdapt communities. Topics of discussion included the roles knowledge generation and dissemination can play in Africa and the challenges that must be overcome for such opportunities to be inclusive, relevant and applicable.

This brief presents highlights and major recommendations from the presentations, personal narratives and international discussion that emerged during the ACCFP/ AfricaAdapt session at COP17. The brief is intended as a resource for others who wish to initiate and/or facilitate their own conversations around these and related issues.

## ***Why is knowledge sharing important in climate change?***

Given the current knowledge gaps in Africa and the potential power knowledge has to reduce the impacts on climate related risks, it is worth investing in the creation and enhancement of new mechanisms for knowledge generation and sharing. There remains a critical need for cross-scale exchange of knowledge and best practices to support the



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implementation of near- and long-term adaptation strategies that advance climate compatible development and equity in Africa. In order for adaptation strategies to be best informed, co-generation of knowledge and knowledge sharing across multiple knowledge systems is critical.

For example, we would be remiss to focus only on scientific knowledge and not draw from indigenous knowledge and expertise in climate change, as each type of knowledge contributes to both reducing and preparing for uncertainty. While uncertainty will remain an obstacle for decision-making, sharing existing experiences and success stories provide evidence-based options to inform policy and action. Without adequate knowledge sharing, it is unclear what our next step should be regarding climate change adaptation. The complexity of the process and its constantly evolving nature also beg the question: What must be done so that policy and decision-makers can integrate such a wide range of knowledge and research outputs into their decision-making processes?

### ***Challenges to sharing knowledge***

It is widely recognized that there is a gap between the people who produce scientific knowledge that informs adaptation and the people who need to apply that knowledge on the ground. Our challenge is to bridge this gap and break down silos of academic and practitioner-based disciplines in order to create a healthy and sustained landscape of trust and shared dialogue that generates need-driven knowledge.

Another challenge to sharing knowledge can be institutional barriers and technical capacity. It can be difficult to make decisions informed by sound science when decision-makers cannot always depend on African institutions to have correct information, have the resources to conduct the research, or have access to information. Furthermore, it is important that external demands such as financing and support will help to facilitate needs-based knowledge exchange and not further complicate them by shifting interests and priorities with limited input from regional voices. Integrated country-driven responses must guide the entirety of a project including planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

### ***Opportunities and tools***

Although it is necessary to have knowledge management systems in place, it can become overwhelming when every institution has a different approach to knowledge generation and exchange. Where appropriate, there is an opportunity to produce streamlined and standardized approaches to creating and sustaining linkages between knowledge sharing and knowledge generation. Frameworks of integrated, interdisciplinary approaches can foster dialogue and mutual learning between science, policy, practice and communities that trigger follow-on activities and sustained action beyond initial dialogues.

In order for this to occur, drive and effort is needed from all actors to encourage communication and knowledge sharing regarding research, place-based needs, outreach and concrete action items. Scientists and policymakers must devote time and have a sincere interest in building symbiotic relationships that will ultimately inform policy. Other tools such as nonscientific publications, radio, and other non-print media can be used to explain concepts and recommendations in nontechnical language to broader audiences and decision-makers. In addition, interactive e-portals, if designed effectively and used by participants, can be effective tools to connect people and showcase local experiences through tangible stories. Regardless of specific tools used, we need to build new forums for learning and multidirectional exchange among key actors across scales and sectors.

### ***Communication for action***

New knowledge has the potential power to inspire new ideas and inform new interpretations of existing knowledge and experiences. However, knowledge generation for the sake of knowledge generation alone is inadequate. A coordinated response is needed to document and track how knowledge is used and what implications it has for people who need and apply that knowledge on the ground. If knowledge is generated, shared, and used in effective manners it has tremendous power to change lives and environments. Committed, long-term efforts are needed to enhance the impact of scientific research on place-based and solution-focused needs.



The participation of ACCFP Alumni in COP17 was supported by the Climate Change Adaptation in Africa (CCAA) program. Pictured above, the participants were: (Left to Right) Dr. Felix Olorunfemi, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research; Ms. Arame Tall, Johns Hopkins University/Red Cross-Red Crescent Climate Centre; Dr. Mzime Ndebele-Murisa, University of the Western Cape; Ms. Caroline Kirungu, Kenya Sugar Research Foundation; Dr. Saidu Oseni, Obafemi Awolowo University; and Dr. Chipu Mubaya, ACCFP Secretariat at the IRA-University of Dar Es Salaam. Find video blogs about two of the ACCFP alumni's COP17 experiences at [www.start.org](http://www.start.org).

