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# CARE AT ADAPTATION FUTURES

Montreal, Canada October 2nd to 6th, 2023.

## CARE Participation and Key Take Aways from the Conference.

### OVERVIEW

Between October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> 2023, approximately 2,110 researchers, policymakers, practitioners, industry representatives and communicators from 127 countries met in Montreal, Canada, and online for the 7th edition of the Adaptation Futures conference by the World Adaptation Science Programme (WASP) to:

- Learn from Indigenous, local knowledge and voices in climate change adaptation research, policies, practices, and actions around the world.
- Bring marginalized voices, especially from the Global South to the forefront in pursuit of climate justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Accelerate the adoption of transformative adaptation for long-term resilience.
- Accelerate momentum towards the Global Goal on Adaptation and the Global Stocktake and build action to implement effective adaptation.

CARE colleagues from Ethiopia, Denmark, Germany, USA and Canada attended the conference and participated in six sessions discussing and debating transformative and locally-led adaptation, frontline organizations as critical enablers of effective and socially just climate adaptation, scaling-up community based adaptation (CBA), locally-led nature-based solutions (NbS), resilience building in fisheries management and hydro-social landscape approaches to link improved water management, health and other co-benefits in the face of climate change.

This brief presents **key messages** from CARE shared at the Adaptation Futures Conference and **key takeaways** from the CARE staff who attended the conference in person.

## CARE PARTICIPATION AND KEY MESSAGES

### Learning from Indigenous and local peoples' knowledges and expertise in adaptation.

**Clarity and co-creation.** Most INGOs have started the processes of “shifting the power” or “localization”. We recognize the responsibility to make sure adaptation solutions are designed and implemented in a way that is equitable, informed by local priorities and inclusive of local knowledge and expertise. Clear strategies and visions on merging various knowledge sets need to be co-created between INGOs and communities to take these commitments beyond paper promises.

**Donor agendas must reflect local realities.** Although Western donors are moving towards directly funding local implementing agencies, donors still largely determine the local agenda, and local agencies still have limited opportunities to provide inputs in the design of a project and provide local solutions. This can be reversed if donors take the time to visit and most importantly listen to communities to better understand the local context.



**Self-reflection.** The decolonization process requires INGOs to be introspective and reflect on how power and information are shared between the INGOs / partners located more closely to traditional funding sources in richer economies, and the offices where projects are implemented.

We have to be willing to give up some of that power.

**Grassroots leadership.** Governments should take actions and decisions to support and fund leadership of grassroots and indigenous organizations, so they can effectively engage in the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation global and national climate processes.

### Dealing with multiple risks: Compound, cascading, cross-border climate change risks.

**Humanitarian actors must team up with development, conflict, and climate actors** to develop and implement comprehensive and complementary activities that help reduce risks and strengthen the resilience of crisis-affected people and communities to a changing climate. We need to develop partnerships across the Humanitarian, Development, Peace and Climate Nexus, breaking siloes and developing new ways of working and multisectoral collaboration.

**Climate impacts in one country may spill over** and lead to cascading effects in other countries (neighboring and distant). Adaptation in one country may redistribute or increase risk in other countries or provide benefits to other countries, regionally or globally. We must recognize the importance of these cross-border climate impacts.

**To provide better understanding of the nature of cross-border climate risks,** the potential cascading, cross-border effects, their timescales, their transmission modes and related adaptation efforts, innovative research on cross-border climate risks is critical.

**We need a global response.** We need international cooperation not only on sharing good practices but actual cooperation to address shared climate risks including information sharing, and legal and institutional harmonization. Donors should explore mechanisms for supporting more regional,

transboundary and transnational approaches to climate change adaptation.

### **Making adaptation choices: managing trade-offs and seeking effective adaptation.**

**We need to assess who benefits and who loses from implementing adaptation solutions** to better understand and address trade-offs, then find ways to minimize the impact on people who will not benefit. Participatory decision making that is fair and transparent allows for an open discussion on trade-offs.

**For adaptation to be effective**, we need to incorporate knowledge from local communities that are being impacted by climate change, scientific community that can conduct climate analysis, and intermediaries that can create a connection between partners, donors, and government to implement the most appropriate adaptation solutions.

### **When we can no longer adapt.**

**Even effective adaptation does not prevent all losses and damages.** Losses and damages are already unequally distributed across systems, regions and sectors and not addressed by any existing financial, governance and institutional arrangements, particularly in developing countries. And as temperatures rise, losses and damages will increase, adaptation costs will become higher, and even more human and natural systems will reach their adaptation limits.

**An effective global financing instrument for loss and damage** is most urgently required to help countries devastated by climate impacts rebuild. Inaction on loss and damage will aggravate humanitarian needs as well as peace and stability

in affected countries, with regional and global spillover effects.

### **Who wins, who loses, who decides: Equity & justice in adaptation.**

**Impacts of climate change disproportionately affect marginalized groups** creating climate injustice. We need to address inequities and support climate vulnerable people, such as those poor women and men, people of color, indigenous, disabled, older, and younger people by bringing them to the decision-making table.

**No climate justice without gender justice.** We must consider how gender inequalities are linked to climate vulnerability and how gender identities and roles may affect women's and men's perceptions, opportunities, and capacities. It is essential to prioritize drivers of gender justice in adaptation such as increased access to information, equal access to resources for climate adaptation, gender transformative policies in adaptation, and increased opportunities for leadership.

**Participatory processes.** We want to see further acceleration of the development and implementation of participatory, inclusive and gender-transformative National Adaptation Plans and NDCs in the context of a coherent approach to various global frameworks.

**Reduce top-down ways of working.** Power dynamics need to be analyzed between donors, intermediaries, and communities. Donors still prefer to work with intermediaries like INGOs to make decisions since INGOs act as "brokers" between donors and communities. To reduce top-down ways of working, donors need to engage directly with local communities to make decision

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making more transparent and create accountability between donors, intermediaries, and local communities.

### The power of nature for climate action.

**Traditional experience.** NbS is more than plants and grey and green infrastructure. It is about nature's relationship with people. NbS can support adaptation if done well, where traditional and local knowledge is used to sustainably use nature to adapt to climate change.

**Broad benefits.** Positive outcomes for biodiversity and natural ecosystems must be intentionally included starting at the design phase of any NbS intervention, bringing together local knowledge and biodiversity monitoring mechanisms. Nbs is not just about using nature for economic development, we need to better integrate social and environmental benefits.

**Potential for people and planet.** We need to integrate the use of biodiversity and ecosystem services into adaptation strategies through activities such as sustainable management of

forests, wetlands, mangroves, and reefs which increase climate resilience for people and the planet.

**Governments must set up institutions that can foster effective collaboration** between municipalities, communities and their representatives, scientists, and engineers for sustainable and scalable integration of nature-based solutions into planning, implementation, and subsequent learning of how NbS contributes to wellbeing, mental health, and community cohesion.

**Carbon markets.** Carbon markets have the potential to raise funds to promote NbS. Payments through carbon markets that focus on reducing emissions could help finance NbS projects which focus on adaptation. But this requires carbon markets to take into consideration the needs and interests of people, so that finance from carbon markets reaches the most climate vulnerable to help them adapt, while creating the space for transparency, equity, and inclusion.

## Teaching and learning adaptation in a changing climate.

**Equip young people.** Climate change is reshaping the world young people have inherited, and they will bear the costs in the coming decades. However, young people are often excluded from taking on leadership roles and engaging in decision-making activities related to climate change adaptation. Our Toolkit for Youth on Adaptation & Leadership aims to equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to engage in climate adaptation policy, advocacy, and action.

**Peer to peer knowledge exchange.** How can we support youth mentors that can teach other youth on climate change adaptation and how to conduct vulnerability assessments? This type of mentoring peer to peer knowledge exchange is highly effective.



**Mainstreaming climate education** has the potential to change mindsets and behaviors on climate among students, parents, caregivers, communities, and governments.

**Synchronize school-based climate change adaptation approaches with cross-sectoral community-led approaches.** This can be done through the use and adaptation of tested and validated tools and methodologies to support communities develop and deepen awareness around climate change concepts and challenges and plan for locally led climate change adaptation

plans. These tools could include CVCA and community-based and locally led adaptation plans (LAPA). The use of these tools can help to ensure consistency between what children are learning at school and what is happening in their communities and sustain new practices and behaviors related to climate change adaptation.

## Inclusive adaptation governance and finance: how do we get there?

**Reform adaptation finance channels.** Increase the allocation and access for those who need it most by reducing administrative barriers and funding and supporting women-led local institutions and groups, including through the operationalization of key principles of locally led adaptation and resilience-building.

**Funders should allow flexibility in eligibility criteria** to allow smaller organizations with limited operational capacity to develop proposals. Often if the funding application processes are too laborious or complex, small local organizations are automatically excluded.

**Accessibility.** Success in adaptation finance should be measured through the number of communities accessing the funds and total funds allocated, the degree to which funded programs address gender inequality and social inclusion, the types of innovations in adaptation emerging from financed programs, and transparency in financial reporting.

**District / local level governance.** Programme implementers must conduct regular meetings among local and district-level stakeholders to review progress, discuss learnings, and coordinate programming regarding locally led adaptation, with greater financing and resources to support coordination in LLA at the district level.

**Shared learnings.** Platforms at the district and national levels should be established for shared and multi-sector learning, dialogues, and coordination in LLA between government, NGOs, communities, and relevant partners.

## KEY TAKE AWAYS FROM THE CONFERENCE

### Transformative Adaptation.

Transformative adaptation (TA) is a concept emerging in scientific and sustainable development debates as both a necessity and an opportunity. It involves moving away from “business as usual”, incremental change to creating fundamental systemic changes that lead to new states and interactions within socio-ecological systems. For example, in an agricultural context, TA would mean moving away from building irrigation systems (incremental adaptation) to people moving away from agriculture to off-farm activities as climate change creates more droughts or floods. The extent to which TA is desirable or possible is up for debate but it is a concept that will continue to grow in use. It will depend on whether people want to drastically change their way of life, and if they are ready for bold innovations that can be scaled across landscapes and communities. It will also depend on whether the process can be equitable. Much more research is required to determine if and when TA would be beneficial and how it can be done successfully.

### Scaling Locally led Adaptation.

The concept of Locally led Adaptation (LLA) has gained considerable momentum in recent years. This notion emphasizes the importance of empowering local communities to have control over defining, prioritizing, designing, monitoring, and evaluating adaptation actions in response to climate change in their communities. Involving local actors in all decision-making processes, not only builds trust and fosters a sense of ownership among local actors, but also ensures that projects are effectively tailored to the unique needs of climate vulnerable communities, while also reducing the risks of maladaptation. While LLA has

received support worldwide, it’s narrow focus on the local scale alone, may not by itself bring about the necessary shifts that could lead to scaling adaptation solutions, as it also requires robust engagement with regional, national, and international processes and transboundary adaptation planning (e.g., river management). While most INGOs have started the processes of “shifting the power” or “localization”, there seems to be less consensus and understanding of how the concept is operationalized to scale adaptation solutions. It is therefore crucial to continue to unpack and research the potential for – and modus operandi through which - LLA may contribute to transformational adaptation and scaling.

An example from Kenya shows that directing decision-making and financing regimes closer to communities affected by the climate crisis can be catalytic and drive essential changes in adaptation strategies. Here county level funding for climate change adaptation has improved the local ability to implement solutions, involving a whole-of-society approach, supported by LLA principles. Establishing the county level fund also included government at the sub-regional and national levels as well as international stakeholders. This is an example where scaling climate finance has happened at the county level with a climate finance model that has the potential to scale across Kenya.

### Gender and Social Inclusion in Adaptation.

Development fund management modalities were questioned from the angles of gender inclusiveness, access to finance by women, and overall fund utilization for adaptation-specific programming purposes. Women are

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disadvantaged in accessing and benefiting from climate adaptation funding due to the lack of adequacy of the efforts being made to ensure the active engagement of women. Nonetheless, women are contributing to adaptation and mitigation efforts in their communities. Funding agencies/donors should consult women to better understand and put forward the specific needs of women. Engaging in policy debate is needed to make climate finance programs more inclusive and gender transformative. Addressing differentiated needs based on factors such as gender in climate financing has been slow for different reasons: lack of evidence substantiating the problems; failure to approach these problems in complex ways; bureaucracy has no time to deal with complex issues; most donors and funding agencies have lesser knowledge as to where gender would fit in programming; research articles on gender and finance are not made for the public; and limited strategy for making entry points at national and international levels.

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### Climate Justice from Decolonisation and Indigenous Peoples Inclusion Perspectives.

Climate justice is a political issue, not just a biophysical one. Key elements to consider: there is no climate adaptation without territorial security, hence there is a need to recognize land and water rights of indigenous peoples; the benefits of climate financing need to be accessed by indigenous communities; indigenous peoples need to be involved in decision-making processes that affect their territory and the resources their survival depend on (e.g., declaring an area as "protected" and applying rules to regulate the use of ecosystem services without acknowledging that human beings rely on those ecosystem services to survive deepens climate injustice); and climate

justice is not only an environmental problem, it's also a social, intercultural, intergenerational one. International laws and treaties exist as mechanisms to protect indigenous peoples' rights, but they are not applied by national governments. The language barrier is an important obstacle faced by indigenous and local communities to access climate finance (English is required to be able to knock on funders and supporters' door). Finally, the definition of "Climate Justice" is very North-centric and anthropocentric. It should be re-developed to include indigenous peoples' perspective, including the rights of the environment itself.



### Decolonising Climate Change Adaptation Knowledge.

Climate change adaptation knowledge and solutions exist at the local level. This said, it is sometimes harder to capture, document, disseminate and showcase local knowledge, solutions and expertise due to barriers such as the language it needs to be in, the need to publish in prestigious journals or the ability to travel to international conferences (e.g., visa issuance is often an issue for Global South experts). Local/indigenous knowledge and expertise is also not as equally valued by the "North" as evidence created by the scientific community which is "validated" by rigorous peer review processes and a select group of people. There exists a knowledge monopoly, influenced by politics that do not concern people at the local level. The wealth and breadth of knowledge that exists in the climate change adaptation community should be known and accessible to all.

Similarly, there needs to be a broader recognition and respect of local and indigenous knowledge systems, particularly pertaining to historical and cultural understandings of the impact of climate change on the health of human and nonhuman communities and ecologies. For example, communities often have their own ways of understanding and communicating climate information, which can become deprioritized and discarded in favor of knowledge systems favored by the “North.” Indigenous cosmologies often consider the interconnections and interdependencies between different components of an ecosystem, leading to a more holistic understanding of climate impacts than knowledge systems in the “North” that might favor a more siloed and disciplinary approach. Yet there are often important financial and scientific resources contained in research institutions and meteorology offices, for example, that can be complementary and supportive of local ways of generating knowledge. It is critical to assess and consider the political dimensions of knowledge production in climate change adaptation, the existing systems of local and indigenous knowledge, and what the tensions and mutual benefits could be of combining different forms of knowledge.

### Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for Adaptation.

To successfully scale up NbS for Adaptation, factors (barriers and enablers) influencing perceptions and behavioral change that lead (or not) to the adoption of NbS for Adaptation in a specific context should be understood and considered at the onset for the initiative to be effective. Solutions proposed need to support what people want to improve based on the needs they've identified instead of coming up with a specific idea that uses and benefits nature. Communities are facing a constant dilemma when they are asked to choose between conservation/restoration and their livelihoods. Where is the tradeoff between integrating NbS for Adaptation in livelihoods and supporting better and more profitable livelihoods? NbS for Adaptation must also be economically viable. NbS for Adaptation must also be conceived at the *landscape* scale, thinking beyond political

boundaries, and looking at the ways that communities across rural and urban contexts are connected by their shared uses of and reliance on an ecosystem, especially watersheds. NbS for Adaptation especially needs to be conceptualized in urban settings given that by 2050, it is projected that 75% of the world population will live in cities (currently it is 66%).

However, when trying to incentivize more sustainable uses of environmental resources, socioeconomic and political dimensions must be considered. How do economic valuations of environmental resources exclude cultural and social relationships with ecology? Are the true costs and benefits borne by those being tasked with implementing the more sustainable use (e.g. conservation agriculture) of a resource being considered? When bringing the different users of an environmental resource to negotiations and governance, how are we considering the pre-existing power differentials, and how can we create opportunities for the leadership of those who have been historically excluded from decision-making? All of these questions must be intentionally addressed.



### Adaptation, Resilience and Disaster Risk Management.

Adaptation and resilience are crucial concepts when it comes to disaster risk management (DRM). DRM involves preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters or emergencies. Adaptation refers to the ability of individuals, communities, or systems to adjust or modify their practices and behaviors in order to withstand and



recover from the impacts of these disasters. Resilience, on the other hand, focuses on bouncing back after a disaster by ensuring that critical infrastructure is robust and able to withstand shocks. By adopting an adaptive and resilient approach, DRM aims to minimize both the immediate and long-term risks associated with various hazards such as floods, wildfires or pandemics while ensuring a swift recovery when these events occur. Resilience recovery requires a positive mindset and the ability to adapt to new circumstances, finding creative solutions when faced with obstacles. Resilience comes from within, but it can also be fostered through support systems and developing healthy coping mechanisms. It's not about pretending that everything is fine; rather, it's acknowledging the pain while maintaining the belief that we have the power to overcome it. Resilience recovery is an ongoing journey, requiring patience, self-compassion, and learning from setbacks along the way. It's about growth, embracing change, and becoming stronger in the face of adversity – ultimately emerging as a wiser version of ourselves.

### Transhuman/transboundary Adaptation for Pastoral Communities.

The convergence of recurrent and prolonged droughts, regular flooding, and conflicts in the Horn of Africa, has led to failed crops, loss of livestock, climate-induced displacement, and degradation of traditional livelihoods, and thus plunged pastoralists, particularly women, into deep chronic food insecurity. They typically have very limited adaptive capacity, due to the frequency of shocks (often they do not manage to recover from one shock until the next one hits). However, research from the region shows that certain pastoral groups exhibit remarkable

resilience, often relying on informal social safety nets to navigate adversities. However, so far, both governmental and multilateral interventions in the region have failed to provide the transformative solutions to the climate and conflict crisis needed for pastoralists, failing to address the root causes of the crisis. More knowledge is needed on the complex interactions between climate change and conflicts, for devising comprehensive strategies to mitigate their combined impact on pastoralists. Further research and innovative approaches are also required on effective methods to track the movement of livestock, enabling better early warning, and management resource allocation. This is where transhuman/transboundary adaptation comes into play by exploring how advancements in genetics, biotechnology, and even artificial intelligence can help these communities adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world. For example, genetically modified crops resistant to drought or smart sensors for more efficient herding practices could lead to improved adaptation. It's all about finding innovative ways to bridge the gap between humans and technology while keeping our traditions alive.



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