

The Gobeshona Conference: Finding Paths to Co-Creation

Two days after arriving in Bangladesh to work as a Visiting Researcher with the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), I had the opportunity to attend its 3rd Gobeshona conference. The conference left me with deep respect for the commitment of researchers, practitioners and policymakers to address climate change and seek innovative and inclusive adaptation solutions.

During five days I saw homemade Bangladeshi research on a wide range of topics like urban resilience, political economy of climate change finance, agriculture and food security, water resource management and local adaptation planning, to only name a few. As each of the session took a different perspective they were like pieces of a puzzle that came together to form a comprehensive picture of climate change adaptation in Bangladesh.

Coming from a political science background myself, it was an important experience to be reminded of all the levels and scientific perspectives from where climate change can be addressed and of how implementation works on the ground. But like any good learning experience, the conference also left me with some unsolved questions.



Panel of Session 11: Ecosystem-Resilience and Biodiversity

The Challenge to Include Local and Systemic Context into Adaptation Projects

In the presentation of adaptation projects and in the discussions that followed them it became apparent how much it remains a challenge to base interventions on a good understanding of the local and the broader context. But understanding context is crucial for the inclusivity and effectiveness of any intervention.

Understanding local context means to understand how an intervention addresses socioeconomic and cultural differences in the community. This is essential to make it inclusive.

For example, setting up an adaptation technology is not only a technical, but also a social and political process with strong implications for different groups of people. This was well illustrated in the case of the installment of a sluice gate in Narail flood plain enclosures which

was presented in the conference. Policy gaps and an implementation practice that did not critically engage with local power structures resulted in the sluice gate being controlled by local elites, big farmers and enclosure owners. Small farmers were not involved in decision processes on the sluice gate operation and benefited less from it.

But it is not only about local context. Even locally limited projects link to the broader, systemic context. For example, a new agricultural method that improves the yield has the potential to save a families` livelihood. But if the local market cannot absorb the surplus production it may well fail to do so. Examples for the linkage between the local and systemic level were animatedly discussed in the session on agriculture and food security. It was pointed out, that in order to be sustainable, technological interventions require a long-term finance mechanism that enables farmers to not only access the technologies but to also to maintain them. Building an intervention on a national policy and establishing links to the local government can further contribute to the sustainability of an intervention and avoid that only isolated islands of effectiveness are created, which miss the chance to achieve a broader change.



Discussions during the conference

How can Co-Creation be Enabled?

But how CAN interventions build on and link to the local and systemic context? It requires to create processes that enable the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, link local with national level and develop adaptation strategies that are grounded in the reality of people that are most vulnerable to climate change. However, whereas this sounds like a good plan in theory, what does that mean in practice? How can a community participation process actually include the most marginalized and voiceless within that community? How can stakeholders be linked across levels to engage in a shared process, despite their obvious power imbalances, vested interests and the organizational pressures they are subject to?

Frustratingly the recognition that a different, more collaborative and holistic approach is needed to address climate change and development in general is not new. Terms like “stakeholder collaboration” and “community participation” have long found their way into policy briefs and strategy papers. But they fail over and over again to translate into practice. This indicates how big the hurdles to co-creation are.

Old Story – New Solutions.

Whilst the Gobeshona conference has cristallized questions for me it has also demonstrated directions for solutions.

One example for this is ICCCAD’s Young Researchers Programme that builds research capacity in Bangladesh to enable the creation of home-grown solutions. The Gobeshona Conference provided a platform for that research and creates a South-South network that links academic institutions from countries like Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and Bhutan. In the panel discussions the conference also links national researchers with policy makers to promote and share solutions made in Bangladesh.

The Gobeshona conference itself was followed by a one day conference `Inspiring Resilience` hosted by the international development charity arm of the BBC, BBC Media Action. Here the TV programme `Amrai Pari` (Together we can do it) was showcased. Based on a major research study, the reality TV show helps to improve peoples` resilience by showing in an engaging way on TV community actions to prepare for and respond to disasters. What makes it special and different to other NGO`s work that it uses new channels to communicate knowledge directly to the community in an entertaining and inspiring way, thereby achieving a wide resonance (15.8 million viewers, BBC Media Action 2015).

The two examples have in common that they both change the way knowledge is produced and shared, thereby creating powerful entry points for action. Overcoming the hurdles to co-creation requires to find this kind of new and innovative pathways. There is many more examples... And more ways to go. Though this is challenging finding new solutions is not an option but a must.



Inspiring resilience: communicating research to people