

Planning for an Uncertain Future

Promoting adaptation to climate change through
Flexible and Forward-looking Decision Making

Executive summary

Lindsey Jones, Eva Ludi, Elizabeth Carabine, Natasha Grist

Aklilu Amsalu, Luis Artur, Carina Bachofen, Patrick Beaument,
Christine Broenner, Matthew Bunce, Janot Mendler de Suarez,
William Muhumuza, Pablo Suarez and Daniel Zacarias



March 2014

CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY are at the heart of development. Ever-shifting development trajectories require planning processes that move away from fixed targets and short-term planning cycles.

Yet many development actors (whether governments, donor agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or businesses) continue to plan for the near term, assuming ‘normal’ conditions, with little room for manoeuvre or contingency. Three- to five-year planning and funding cycles remain the norm, with consideration of consequent long-term implications for investments rare.

The need for decision making that is flexible, forward-looking and able to adapt to the unexpected is therefore clear. One approach for achieving this is ‘flexible and forward-looking decision making’ (FFDM). But what it is, and how can it be operationalised in practice?

In its simplest terms, FFDM is defined as the ability to anticipate, incorporate and respond to changes with regard to governance, structure and future planning. To deal with uncertain futures, FFDM cannot base its decisions solely on evidence from past or existing capabilities and structures; it must also consider possible futures.

Although the operationalisation of FFDM is context-specific, and there are many different pathways to achieving it, in practical terms decision making is flexible and forward-looking when it:

- Recognises that change will happen and requires adaptation, but that the specific direction and magnitude of change, as well as the implications for development trajectories, are uncertain.
- Is able to consider and reason about the impacts of different drivers of change on development trajectories and plans accordingly in order to maintain progress.
- Can identify enablers and initiate steps to overcome barriers to adaptation.
- Can, where needed, make changes to structures and planning processes to implement adaptation effectively, whether incremental or transformational.

However, a transition towards supporting FFDM is likely to face significant obstacles. In some cases, it will require a complete transformation and an overhaul

Key Messages

- Despite change and uncertainty being at the heart of development, many actors continue to plan for the near-term with little room for manoeuvre or contingency. Three- to five-year planning and funding cycles remain the norm. A move towards promoting more Flexible and Forward-looking Decision Making (FFDM) is therefore crucial.
 - As a concept, FFDM is relatively straightforward to understand. In practice, though, it is often hard to relate to complex real-world problems. We therefore need new approaches to help communicate and promote the principles that make up FFDM to development practitioners.
 - FFDM need not be seen as a stand-alone approach, but the principles of FFDM can and should be embedded in other relevant approaches such as those focusing on resilience-building, climate change adaptation or sustainable development.
 - Innovative tools that encourage two-way exchange of knowledge and experiential learning can help in communicating abstract concepts. ACCRA trialled a “game-enabled reflection approach”, combining serious games with structured reflection sessions.
 - Understanding the political-economy context, ensuring political buy-in and identifying ‘champions of change’ are key for promoting the uptake and implementation of FFDM in development policy and practice.
 - Effective promotion of the principles of FFDM requires fundamental changes to the way that development is thought about, funded, implemented and evaluated. It cannot simply be left to those at the receiving end of development funds to ensure their interventions are promoting FFDM.
 - Trialling and researching innovative experiential tools require a balance between allowing the approach to evolve and improve to achieve the highest possible capacity building outcomes, and focusing on consistency of the approach itself and how it is implemented to ensure high-quality rigorous research.
-

of current practices, recognising that organisational structures, mindsets, priorities and incentives of development actors are deeply ingrained and often slow to change. Promoting principles of FFDM within development policy will also require tailored guides, participatory tools and practical case studies to help ensure successful uptake and implementation.

This report documents the activities of the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA) in seeking to strengthen FFDM among district development actors. It describes research carried out while trialling an innovative and interactive tool to promote FFDM – a ‘game-enabled reflection approach’ – accompanied by capacity-building activities. ACCRA undertook case studies at the district level in three countries, namely, in Kotido, Uganda, in Gemechis, Ethiopia, and in Guijá, Mozambique. Building on these three case studies, this report outlines key findings and makes recommendations on how to better support decision-making processes for an uncertain future. It does so in view of helping to understand the use of FFDM as well as the effectiveness and limitations of a game-enabled reflection approach.

The ACCRA programme and its objectives

ACCRA is a consortium of five development partners – Oxfam GB, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), CARE International, Save the Children and World Vision International. Established in 2009, it engages in research, capacity building and advocacy in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda, working with governments, NGOs/civil society organisations (CSOs) and communities.

In seeking to support adaptive capacity at the local level (in this context the term ‘local’ refers to actors and processes that operate at the community level and below), ACCRA’s research team in Phase 1 sought to understand what makes a community able to adapt to change. This resulted in the development of the Local Adaptive Capacity (LAC) framework (see Jones et al., 2010). Building on previous literature, and validated through nine district case studies across the three ACCRA countries, the LAC framework describes five key characteristics of local adaptive capacity: the asset base; institutions and entitlements; knowledge and information; innovation; and forward-looking and flexible decision making and governance.

To apply the learning from Phase 1 (see Levine et al., 2011), ACCRA chose to trial a hands-on approach in support of adaptive capacity. Findings from ACCRA’s earlier research pointed to a need to support

district development actors where tools and guidance for enhancing capacity were either inadequate or absent. Recognising that promoting five different characteristics of adaptive capacity through a single tool may be a challenge, and that all five characteristics are interrelated, the consortium opted to focus primarily on one: FFDM.

As a concept, FFDM is relatively straightforward to understand. In practice, though, it is often hard to communicate and to relate to complex real-world problems. We therefore need new approaches to promoting the principles that make up FFDM. One solution comes in the form of ‘serious games’ supported by tools to initiate reflection on how to relate principles of FFDM experienced during the game to the real world. Through a partnership with the abaci Partnership and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre, ACCRA developed a ‘game-enabled reflection approach’ to promoting FFDM.

The game-enabled reflection approach was tailored for district-level planners and developed into a two- to three-day workshop, accompanied by capacity-building activities. The objective of ACCRA’s research component was therefore to design, trial and document this approach to promoting FFDM with district development planners in each of the three ACCRA countries. This was done with the intention of gaining a better understanding of the merits and limitations of an emerging and little researched approach in the context of climate change adaptation (CCA).

A game-enabled reflection approach

‘Serious’ games can elicit experiential knowledge of complex real-world problems in a memorable, fun and compelling way. A game-enabled reflection approach was chosen because it is able to simulate a system of changing conditions, plausible decisions and related outcomes without having to go through a potentially risky process of actual trial-and-error.

One thing is clear, however: running games without structured reflection will not confer the knowledge and skills needed to act on the lessons learnt during gameplay. Because conditions in all three countries were not immediately conducive to adopting the principles of FFDM straight into the existing policy environment (largely because of rigid planning structures set out by central government), desired behavioural changes were promoted by combining capacity building in the LAC framework with game sessions and in-depth reflection. Having first introduced the FFDM principles and desired behaviours, participants then experienced working in an FFDM way by playing the game – and in the next step

started to think how they might use the insights gained in their line of work.

Game playing needed to be embedded in reflection sessions to help players understand the ‘wiggle room’ (i.e. the scope for freedom of action or thought) available to them in the real world, and weigh the challenges and opportunities in collectively moving towards FFDM ways of working. This ‘wiggle room’ is context-dependent, but may include autonomy to explore new partnerships; seeking information and advice from external sources; greater collaboration across sectors, across districts or between districts and national levels; pooling resources; and drawing up contingency plans. Each of these can often be done within the context of otherwise rigid central structures, top-down planning systems and lack of resources.

While a game will not, without being impossibly complex, expose players to the full range of FFDM behaviours and potential ways of working, these are some of the desirable outcomes that can be stimulated by a game-enabled reflection approach:

- Imagining and considering possible (not just probable) futures over long timescales;
- Appreciating that decisions taken in isolation are usually suboptimal;
- Understanding that there is seldom a single ‘right’ answer;
- Accept the inevitability of short-term shocks and long-term pressures;
- Realising that FFDM ways of working involve not only the district level but also collaboration across institutional, governance and sectoral boundaries;
- Experiencing the benefits of doing more with less (discovering synergies);
- Gaining confidence in exploring FFDM ways of working, that is, experimenting with different strategies over the course of the game and raising difficult issues in a safe space;
- Appreciating that there are many ways in which success can be measured or judged.

Evolution of ACCRA’s game-enabled reflection approach

The workshop methodology evolved from Uganda to Ethiopia and finally Mozambique, and reflects the research and facilitation team’s learning of what works well and what works less well. The workshop was delivered in the three countries at different times relative to the annual planning cycle, thus insights gained could not necessarily be applied immediately in planning

processes. It was not designed as a standalone product; it was always envisaged that it would be accompanied by focused capacity-building activities. Finally, the three countries’ socio-political and cultural contexts are very different, which may have influenced the workshops’ outcomes and impacts considerably.

ACCRA’s research and methods

Understanding the characteristics of adaptive capacity is far from easy. Adaptive capacity (i) is context-specific; (ii) is largely intangible (key enablers of adaptive capacity, such as power or agency, are often difficult to observe); and (iii) has no commonly agreed means of measurement. No single research tool or method is adequate to identify whether and how ACCRA’s activities have influenced the decision-making processes of local governments – and in the process enhanced their and their constituents’ adaptive capacity. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are needed, as outlined in the table below. In applying this mixed methods approach, the research team sought to analyse and document the impact of the game-enabled reflection approach, and accompanying capacity-building activities, in the context of ACCRA’s three country case studies. (See Table on page 4)

Although a multi-methods approach is desirable for assessing the impact of capacity-building activities, it is not without its caveats:

1. Surveys, to be able to produce meaningful results, should include a large number of participants. As only a limited number of participants attended the FFDM workshops, the extent to which it was possible to draw robust conclusions is limited. This does not diminish the intrinsic value of the information gathered.
2. Although the research methodology and timelines were designed so they could be carried out in a similar manner in each country, this was not always possible, owing to contextual, political and in some cases natural factors (severe flooding required the rescheduling of activities in Mozambique). Drawing direct comparisons of findings across countries is thus difficult.
3. Although they have many uses, surveys cannot capture all of the nuances in understanding different interpretations and applications of the workshop. Respondents might not always fully understand the question, might be rushed, might answer to meet what they assume to be the researcher’s expectations or might answer strategically to better address their own needs.

Overview of mixed methods approaches adopted by ACCRA's research team

Research tool	Format	Sequencing	Purpose
Political economy analysis	Qualitative	Three to five months before workshop	Understand background and district planning and decision-making context
Baseline key informant interviews	Qualitative	One to two weeks before workshop	Unpick existing policy landscape and structures
Panel surveys	Quantitative	Three rounds: pre-workshop (immediately before), post-workshop (immediately after) and follow-up (five to nine months after)	Measure perceived changes among workshop participants over time
Follow-up interviews	Qualitative	Five to nine months after	Explore drivers of change in district decision-making processes
Internal consultation and consolidation	Qualitative	Subsequent to all three country workshops	Validate experiences and outcomes across the three study countries

4. Although the results of both the quantitative and the qualitative research show that a game-enabled reflection approach can communicate complex issues to lay audiences, as noted by participants in the Guijá workshop, Mozambique:

'The workshop strengthened our thoughts and initiatives and planning – but is not the sole cause of the changes.'
(Director of Health, Guijá district, 2013)

'[The workshop] reinforced what people were already doing in response.' (Director of Agriculture, Guijá district, 2013)

Attributing observed change solely to the workshop is impossible. Furthermore, the time period between the workshop and the follow-up qualitative research was too short to see concrete examples of change in, for example, district plans.

While taking account of the challenging and constantly evolving policy environment, and despite the above caveats, the research and facilitation teams did their best to maintain rigour and robustness in the research process.

Understanding the context in each of the research sites

Although the three countries in which ACCRA is working are distinct in many aspects – climatically, economically and politically – findings from the political economy analysis point to a number of similar challenges influencing the applicability of FFDM principles at the district level.

1. **Top-down planning and decision making.** Although many government functions are devolved to lower administrative levels, major decisions are taken at national level, with limited scope for adaptation to district or community realities. For example,

the Ethiopian five-year development plan defines targets the country wishes to achieve. District development plans are prepared in line with this national plan and its priorities and targets. A central characteristic of this top-down system relates to funding mechanisms. Lower administrative units, especially districts, typically do not raise their own funds through taxation, but rely on centrally administered block grants, often clearly earmarked for specific investments in key development sectors (such as agriculture, rural infrastructure, water supply, education, health etc.) but rarely for crosscutting issues such as disaster risk reduction (DRR). As highlighted in the case of the Kotido workshop, Uganda:

'We are not really in charge of our plans and budgets. Every Ministry sends its own guidelines.' (District Chairperson, Kotido district, 2013)

2. **Lacking agency and ownership of development initiatives at district level.** Limited opportunities exist to adapt district plans to include new priorities or approaches in the face of sudden shocks (like flooding) or gradual stresses (like shifting patterns of rainfall). This is particularly problematic for issues relating to climate change and resilience, given their cross-sectoral nature and consequent exclusion from national priority areas.
3. **Lacking awareness and incentives for action on adaptation and DRR.** This is perhaps the largest barrier to motivating district governments to adopt FFDM-related principles within longer-term planning processes. Not only is the structure of planning cycles rigid (i.e. districts receive budgets only for certain activities and plan for 'business as usual', generally over annual cycles), but also issues of adaptation, DRR or resilience are not included in the evaluation of a district's 'success' in delivering on targets. Unsurprisingly, district governments in each of the three countries are appraised against central priorities, with performance criteria concentrating on outputs

(e.g. numbers of water points installed) instead of outcomes (e.g. health improvements resulting from increased access to safe water), sustainability or impact. Given the cross-sectoral and often intangible nature of promoting adaptive capacity or supporting DRR activities, FFDM-related indicators are lacking in monitoring and evaluation and performance assessment criteria.

ACCRA's research findings

Recognising that there are differences in the context and implementation of the workshop in each of the three countries, a number of common findings emerged from the research:

1. A game-enabled reflection approach can help in communicating FFDM to development practitioners. Overall, the game-enabled reflection approach did well in bringing across the need to ensure decision making can deal with change and uncertainty. It also proved a useful tool for communicating a new and somewhat abstract concept to development practitioners at the district level. Common examples of how ACCRA's intervention helped inspire action included broader understandings of decision making in the planning processes, greater promotion of cross-sector working and information sharing and awareness raising of the risks of climate change and wider development drivers. In Uganda, closer links have been established between Kotido district and the Natural Resource Department responsible for the dissemination of weather forecasts:

'Now [weather forecasts] come monthly. The Chief Administrative Officer has made it a necessity for them to be disseminated to all local officials.' (Senior Education Officer, Kotido district, 2013)

However, although all three countries registered a sharp spike in participant's confidence in relation to understanding FFDM immediately after the workshop, levels waned slightly during the follow-up evaluations. There was also clear evidence of the need for longer-term support in helping local development actors in operationalising FFDM.

2. Participants associate FFDM with collaboration and integration, rather than flexibility and planning for future change. Although respondents generally perceived FFDM to be difficult to operationalise, they nevertheless saw areas where they could take action and put some of the principles into practice. In follow-up qualitative interviews, all respondents demonstrated some basic understanding of what

FFDM was and could imply for district planning, with varied levels of understanding. Several months after the workshop, many participants were found to understand FFDM mainly as collaborating with colleagues and across sectors: *'we saw the need to work together'* (Director of Health, Guijá district, 2013). Although it is equally important, it was less common to hear interviewees mention flexibility to be able to deal with unexpected changes as something they had retained of the principles of FFDM and would try to apply in their daily work.

3. There were similar impacts across different social groups. Interestingly, only rarely did participants' characteristics, such as age, sector of work or number of years spent working in the district, lead to a significant difference in the survey responses.

Learning and critical reflections

From the wealth of knowledge gained over two years of ACCRA research and capacity building, valuable lessons have been learnt on how to promote and incentivise real change. Among others, these relate to how to package and communicate complex and abstract conceptual messages to reach development practitioners; novel means to bring together different stakeholders to inspire collaboration and coordination; and methods for conducting research to measure impact in challenging (and constantly evolving) policy environments.

Some of these lessons echo long-standing principles of development research, contributing to an expanding body of literature (e.g. the need to recognise local and district context, including language, for effective delivery, or the role of 'champions of change' in promoting new initiatives). Others are relatively new to the field, and may require further exploration and elaboration, in particular which tools are best suited to effectively communicate complex and abstract concepts such as FFDM, or how best to organise a 'game-enabled reflection approach' for strengthening adaptation.

Below we describe a number of key lessons that arose:

1. Communicating an abstract concept to a lay audience is difficult, but can be enabled through innovative experiential learning and reflection tools. Insights from both the qualitative and the quantitative research indicate that many workshop participants struggled to relate to the different components of FFDM, instead associating it solely with collaboration, coordination or mainstreaming. One important lesson learnt was that activities that support greater flexibility and forward-looking decision making are largely context-specific: what works in one context may not have the

same results in another. As FFDM does not follow a single path, care must be taken to ensure the messages communicated in promoting it (or any other abstract concept) are not only palatable but also conducive to the diversity of pathways for achieving it in different contexts.

Another learning point was the need to provide better links between the concept of FFDM and ACCRA's LAC framework. The LAC describes adaptive capacity as comprising five 'distinct yet interrelated' characteristics, as described earlier. While people may be relatively comfortable with one conceptual framework, trying to impose and communicate two theory-laden concepts has distinct challenges.

2. **Understanding the district context, ensuring political buy-in and identifying 'champions of change' are key for promoting FFDM.** District officials in all three countries do have some space for putting the principles of FFDM into practice, that is, utilising the 'wobble room' available (e.g. by collaborating more strongly across sectoral boundaries). Examples of attempts to exploit this 'wobble room' can be seen in the case of West Haraghe, Ethiopia:

'[After the workshop] we increased involvement of the community in the identification and prioritisation of district problems. In addition, the planning process now considers future challenges and problems in anticipation. For example, the district's emergency plan was previously prepared based on prevalent disaster risks – after the disasters occurred. But we now use weather forecast information, and preparation of the emergency plan is carried out not only based on what is prevailing but also in anticipation of potential hazards.' (Zonal Official, West Haraghe, 2013)

However, opportunities like these quickly reach their limits unless active support and buy-in from top-tier decision makers and political leaders is guaranteed. Because adopting the principles of FFDM implies such a fundamental departure from business-as-usual ways of district planning and decision making, the role of 'champions of change' is central to its success. Without committed decision makers and political leaders – at the district and especially at higher administrative levels – change is unlikely to occur and planning will continue to be carried out in a rigid and short-term manner.

3. **Evaluating new approaches often requires difficult trade-offs between research and capacity building.** The aim of ACCRA's research was twofold – to enhance local adaptive capacity by trialling a game-enabled reflection approach to promote FFDM; and to document any impact the approach may have on district decision making. This meant the research team faced a number

of difficult trade-offs. Almost all of these boiled down to two decisions: on the one hand allowing the design of the game-enabled reflection approach to evolve and improve as each iteration was developed and implemented in-country; and on the other hand ensuring high-quality rigorous research – which implies consistency of the approach itself and how it was implemented in each of the three case study areas. This 'give and take' influenced every part of the research and capacity-building process, from selection of workshop sites and timing to sequencing of sessions within the game-enabled reflection approach, and tailoring the design of quantitative surveys.

4. **Successful and sustainable interventions require considerable and well-timed investment.** Is a game-based reflection approach suitable to promoting FFDM? Yes, but only if it is carried out with sufficient time and resources and if it is followed through in full. Responses from the qualitative and the quantitative research indicate that participants considered the approach innovative, and different to the standard forms of capacity building delivered at the district level (typically workshops or meetings). However, coordination of such an innovative activity is not straightforward. The design process must ensure the approach promotes the right messages, is succinct enough to maintain levels of interest and attention over two to three days and resonates with the intended audience. To ensure a new approach is really going to have the desired effect, soliciting inputs from partners during the design phase, field testing (trailing the approach with a small group beforehand), translation and extensive training of facilitators are likely to be required. Finally, finding the right balance of game play and reflection sessions is essential: game play builds confidence in understanding the principles of FFDM, and reflection sessions enable learning on how to apply them in practice to drive institutional and policy change. Each of these activities adds significantly to the resources, inputs and coordination needed.

5. **Changing perceptions and institutional structures is a gradual process, requiring continued support.** A government or organisation's existing structures, as well as a person's values and perspectives, are deeply woven into existing ways of working. Bringing about change through an external intervention – whether promoting FFDM or encouraging gender mainstreaming – rarely happens overnight, in many cases requiring long-term and targeted support. What makes it hard (but not necessarily unique) to encourage FFDM in practice is the intangibility of many of its processes and the difficulty in measuring progress.

An important piece of learning is that delivery of development research has to be flexible and

forward-looking in and of itself, particularly when aiming to trial and refine a new approach or innovative tool. If delivering research is the sole aim, then much will be lost in terms of enhancing the capacity-building process. Although ACCRA's research may not be able to provide empirical evidence to attribute change *solely* to the game-enabled reflection approach (as envisaged at the outset), it does provide useful preliminary evidence of what does and does not work in the delivery of a new tool in an area that has seen little prior research. Alongside further evidence and testing, findings from ACCRA's research can help shape a stronger vision of how to better support adaptive capacity at various levels of decision making.

Conclusions

Decision making, even under normal circumstances, is a tough job. Add climate change-related uncertainties and it becomes even harder. Decision makers have to not only confront difficult problems, but also operate under difficult conditions. Thus, district-level decision makers need tools that help them deal with complexity in a flexible manner and also allow them to consider potential future threats – climate-related and otherwise.

ACCRA and its partners addressed precisely this need, by developing a game-enabled reflection approach focusing on FFDM in a complex and uncertain environment. This approach showed great potential for enabling district-level decision makers to experience outcomes of decision making in a safe environment and under a range of time horizons and uncertainties. The combination of gameplay and reflection sessions, whereby insights from experiences during the game were discussed and reflected on in relation to 'real-world challenges', allowed for in-depth learning and hands-on exposure to FFDM principles.

The research accompanying ACCRA's activities in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda provides the evidence that impact is possible and decision makers can be sensitised to deal with complex issues and future uncertainties. Low sample sizes, lack of baseline information and insufficient knowledge about external interventions in each of the districts made the job of attributing observed changes directly to ACCRA interventions difficult (if not impossible). Nevertheless, by combining qualitative and quantitative data, the research was able to demonstrate that ACCRA's interventions certainly had a role to play in supporting greater awareness of the need for FFDM among district decision makers.

Insights from ACCRA's research also point to how traditional understanding of adaptation planning can be enhanced through greater recognition:

- That principles of adaptation extend beyond climate change and need to consider other changing conditions;
- Of the importance of bridging the national with the local, in particular with regard to incentive structures, target setting and planning cycles;
- That there will always be uncertainty and that precise information about the future is not always available; and
- That considering alternative pathways and contingencies is important to prevent mal-adaptive development trajectories.

In order to have impact and address the often deep-rooted barriers to more flexible and forward-looking district-level decision making, a game-enabled reflection and learning approach should be (i) tailored to local and district contexts; (ii) done over a longer period accompanied by ongoing capacity building; and (iii) supported and bought into by top-tier decision makers and political leaders.

Recommendations

To achieve all of this, based on our learning and on insightful comments received from ACCRA consortium members, partners and district-level workshop participants we recommend the following:

Recommendation 1: Development partners need to experiment with and use experiential tools that help communicate the complexities of planning for change and uncertainty.

There is tremendous value in communicating abstract concepts and frameworks that help unpack complex issues such as adaptive capacity or resilience through the lens of FFDM. We also recognise that a game-enabled reflection approach is not the only way of promoting FFDM, and more research will be needed to explore the merits and limitations of other approaches.

However, three key lessons are important. First, capacity cannot be built without continuing support. In addition, although the communication of complex issues such as FFDM appears to resonate with all stakeholders, attention needs to be paid to connecting what can be done in conceptual terms with real-world suggestions on how this can be implemented in practice. Second, contextualisation and support in thinking through the implications for adaptive capacity of putting FFDM into practice are far harder to facilitate. There is a need for

considerable technical support and guidance from actors both within and outside of the NGO community. Third, ACCRA's game-enabled reflection approach is but one tool that can help communicate the merits of FFDM as a means to strengthen capacity.

Recommendation 2: Development actors need to pay more attention to understanding and appreciating the political economy of the surrounding context. Gaining a better understanding of barriers to and opportunities for FFDM means identifying potential 'champions of change' who can drive the process forward, and identifying windows of opportunity, either in relation to the existing planning process that might offer specific opportunities to introduce novel ideas around FFDM, or offered by national development processes that might help raise issues otherwise difficult to introduce.

Recommendation 3: All characteristics of adaptive capacity need to be better promoted within development policy and practice.

Linking principles of FFDM more strongly with the other characteristics of adaptive capacity described under the LAC framework would enable decision makers to assess the different dimensions of the LAC framework and how far they support or hinder flexibility and longer-term thinking. Such an integrated approach is also recommended as many of the FFDM principles specifically target the areas where LAC dimensions overlap – for example, using climate information to inform the distribution and allocation of critical assets, or supporting innovation to identify suitable livelihood options in a rapidly changing economic and social environment.

Recommendation 4: All development actors need to move towards incorporating principles of FFDM into their programming and operations; it's not simply a tick-box approach. Effective promotion of the principles of FFDM requires fundamental changes to the way development is thought about, funded, implemented and evaluated. It cannot simply be left to those at the receiving end of development funds to ensure their interventions are promoting FFDM by means of a simple guideline or checklist. Rather, a wide range of organisational structures and processes need to open up opportunities for encouraging the uptake and application of FFDM principles among all key actors: from redefining roles, responsibilities and incentive systems to recruitment and training and defining specific indicators for monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

FFDM has many potential overlaps with recent debates about operationalising resilience. Ensuring organisations are abiding by the principles of FFDM is a requirement for resilient organisations – those that are

able to thrive in the face of change and uncertainty. In practice, this can be done in many ways, not just through promoting tools that help communicate and enable an understanding of FFDM principles, but also through incorporating crucial aspects into M&E systems.

One way of changing behaviour among development partners and ensuring two-way communication is to promote co-exploration and co-production of knowledge, which involves jointly understanding the needs and realities of those involved in or affected by an issue and working up solutions together. Such approaches also require actors to be cognisant of power and power relationships. If done well, a game-enabled reflection approach should embody the key principles of co-exploration and co-production such as jointly defining the issue at stake, sharing experiences and knowledge from the perspective of the workshop participants and workshop organisers and identifying solutions together.

Practical options for introducing FFDM in organisational structures and processes

Promoting FFDM requires actions on the part of all development actors. However, each actor has a different role to play. Below, we highlight a number of practical actions that can be undertaken in supporting development policy and practice to move beyond from fixed targets and short-term planning cycles.

District government:

- Recognising inherent limitations in the rigidity of policy cycles and planning processes, there is always *some* 'wiggle room': opportunities exist to do things differently. For example, even when strict targets are handed down from central government, district governments often decide the specific modalities of implementation.
- Collaboration across and within different sectors is a good way to start. It allows for sharing of resources and harmonisation of related activities. This can begin simply through regular updates and exchanges, or more meaningfully through joint planning initiatives, pooling of human and financial resources and sharing of technical staff.
- As part of the planning process, reflection on where the district aims to be on time horizons beyond the traditional three- to five-year planning cycles is important. Internal discussions and exercises to encourage people to envisage (the many) possible

futures and pathways to get there are potential options. In many contexts, robust information on the future is not available at the scale and level of certainty required by district decision makers, so ensuring district plans are able to anticipate, shape and mitigate uncertain and changing risks is important. For example, in Uganda, each district is required to establish its own district disaster management committee. These are tasked with developing contingency plans and defining the various roles and responsibilities of district development actors, in the face of a number of hazards (ranging from common threats such as drought to largely unpredictable and rare events such as earthquakes). Yet having a plan is not enough. Being able to adequately mobilise the resources and the technical capacity to implement it is equally important. Part of the application of FFDM is addressing the need to periodically review, assess and update existing plans to accommodate for change.

NGOs and CSOs:

- As actors that are expected to promote and support the uptake of FFDM, NGOs and CSOs need to demonstrate that they too are abiding by its principles. This would mean moving away from the delivery of purely technical packages towards more support for other characteristics of adaptive capacity. In relation to the LAC framework, this implies a shift from focusing on supporting the ‘asset base’ to, for example, greater emphasis on creating an enabling environment for fostering innovation. This also means a move towards more flexible programming, resource and staff allocation and cross-sectoral programming. In many ways similar to district planners, NGOs are prone to focusing their activities and programmes on shorter-term timescales, often with a very narrow sectoral focus.
- Not only do NGOs and CSOs have a role to play in promoting FFDM internally, but also they are key agents of change in supporting its uptake by other actors. Specific areas where NGOs and CSOs can play a role include mobilising technical and financial resources to promote ongoing dialogue around FFDM; promoting collaboration across sectoral boundaries; bringing stakeholders that would not

normally collaborate together; and sharing learning and practical experience.

National governments:

- National governments play a key role as they set the parameters for planning at all administrative levels. National governments should therefore (i) encourage districts to develop longer-term strategies that incorporate principles of FFDM; (ii) give greater levels of freedom to lower levels of administration to define and shape their own development targets based on local needs and priorities; (iii) recognise that change and uncertainty will influence the achievement of predefined targets, and promote mechanisms that allow for greater flexibility; (iv) incentivise the utilisation of FFDM principles, through target setting and provision of guidance for development planning as well as for FFDM performance indicators; and (v) prevent a ‘siloed’ approach to planning through encouraging greater coordination across sectors and ministries, between different levels of government and between government and other relevant actors.

Donors and multilateral agencies:

- Donors and multilateral agencies need to ensure their internal structures and processes are also able to respond to changing priorities and unforeseen circumstances. They set the parameters by which many NGOs and CSOs deliver their development activities and interventions, yet, even in the face of changing conditions, few donors encourage recipients of their support to deviate from their original terms of reference. Measures should be put in place to enable greater flexibility in the delivery of project outputs to accommodate for changing pressures by moving away from target-based thinking to looking for beneficial outcomes in the longer term. In addition, the timescales of donor funding, typically ranging from two to five years from inception to completion, provide very little incentive for programmes to consider and promote longer-term objectives within their own activities. There is considerable scope for the application of FFDM principles to improve these ways of working.

This is a summary of the report *Planning for an Uncertain Future: Promoting adaptation to climate change through Flexible and Forward-looking Decision Making (FFDM)*, summarising research carried out under ACCRA.

ACCRA – the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance – is a research, advocacy and capacity building consortium of Oxfam GB, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Care International, Save the Children and World Vision International. It works in Mozambique, Uganda and Ethiopia.

ACCRA is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The full report is available at www.odi.org.uk

Other relevant ACCRA publications include:

Jones, L., Ludi, E. and Levine, S. (2010) 'Towards a Characterisation of Adaptive Capacity: A Framework for Analysing Adaptive Capacity at the Local Level'. Background Note. London: ODI.

Levine, S., Ludi, E. and Jones, L. (2011) *Rethinking Support for Adaptive Capacity to Climate Change: The Role of Development Interventions*. London: ACCRA, ODI.

Ludi, E., Jones, L., and Levine, S. (2012) *Changing focus? How to start taking adaptive capacity seriously*. Briefing Paper 71. London, ODI.

Jones, L., Ludi, E., Beautelement, P., Broenner, C. and Bachofen, C. (2013a) 'New Approaches to Promoting Flexible and Forward-Looking Decision Making: Insights from Complexity Science, Climate Change Adaptation and "Serious Gaming"'. London: ODI.

Jones, L., Ludi, E., Amsalu, A. Artur, L., Bunce, M., Matheson, S., Muhumuza, W. and Zacarias, D. (2013b) 'The Political Economy of Local Adaptation Planning: Exploring Barriers to Flexible and Forward-looking Decision Making in Three Districts in Ethiopia, Uganda and Mozambique'. London: ODI.

ODI

203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ, UK

Copyright © ODI, 2014

The views and opinions presented in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of ODI, ACCRA, ACCRA consortium members and affiliates, DFID or the alliance members of CDKN.

Designed by Nicky Barneby @ Barneby Ltd
Edited by Roo Griffiths
Printed by Copyprint UK Ltd, London