

Understanding the Use of Knowledge Resources in Supporting Climate Action*

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Knowledge resources, including data, tools, guidance, or advisory services, are fundamental to help national governments effectively implement climate action. This paper offers lessons, drawn from NDC Partnership members, for those involved in the funding and development of knowledge resources on how to make these resources most effective and useful.

Key lessons include:

- The process through which a resource is developed is as important as the final product. Face-to-face convenings and the co-production of knowledge resources with targeted users are vital processes to support knowledge resource development and capacity-building, especially for low-to-middle income countries.
- Technical resources should be tailored to different contexts to maximize their usefulness. This includes greater investment in language translations, recognition of differing capabilities and audiences, and attention to social and political norms.
- National research institutions and universities are often seen by policymakers as trusted sources of knowledge. Engaging with them can be an effective way to ensure domestic contexts are reflected in resources and build up sustained in-country capacity.
- Working relationships between subject matter experts and government officials should be cultivated to facilitate the translation and application of technical resources to local contexts and expand their usefulness in decision-making.

BACKGROUND

There are thousands of knowledge resources whose goal is to provide data, analysis, and guidance to support climate change mitigation and adaptation. The NDC Partnership's Climate Toolbox, a selective platform, alone has more than 500 such resources. However, not enough is known about whether these tools are useful, who exactly is using them, and whether the right capacity exists to implement the good practices these tools document.

* This paper captures insights from the NDC Partnership as seen by the Support Unit. It does not reflect the views of the NDC Partnership member countries or institutions.

The NDC Partnership draws together leading knowledge producers, helping to empower countries to accelerate climate action and take on more ambitious goals. Ensuring the Partnership’s knowledge efforts are impactful requires a deeper understanding of the use of knowledge resources. This means looking beyond whether enough tools are being produced and looking instead at whether it is the *right* knowledge, for the *right* users. Bringing together more than 90 countries and dozens of knowledge partners, the NDC Partnership is well-positioned to move this conversation forward with both the users and producers of knowledge resources. This includes examination of what makes a knowledge resource useful for NDC implementation, who is using knowledge resources and for what purpose, and what processes are needed to make the production and use of knowledge resources more effective.

Through convenings, surveys, interviews, and research, the NDC Partnership Support Unit has developed a set of working recommendations to help improve the usefulness and impact of knowledge in climate planning and implementation. These working recommendations are offered as the basis for discussion with partners to help shape the NDC Partnership Support Unit’s work, as well as to inform the work of the wider Partnership.

What exactly is a “knowledge resource”?

Knowledge resources are tools, products, or services used by decision-makers and those supporting them to inform planning and decision-making processes on climate action.

These fall into three categories:

- 1. Data and analysis (e.g. data sets or data visualization tools)**
- 2. Process guidance (e.g. guides, toolkits, handbooks, or help desks)**
- 3. Knowledge sharing (e.g. case studies, peers, or forums for sharing lessons)**

CHALLENGES AROUND THE USE OF KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES

Countries face several common challenges in the use of knowledge resources.

First, institutional and financial capacity – particularly in developing countries – is often too low to dedicate substantial time to identifying and applying knowledge resources. The large and growing volume of climate tools and resources available to users can be overwhelming to navigate, and even once resources are identified, effectively applying knowledge often requires technical capacity. This is especially true of long, dense, or technical resources. When capacity does exist, turnover in government ministries and reliance on external consultants pose additional challenges to maintaining capacity. The lack of financial capacity can inhibit access to tools with paywalls, as can the lack of ability to attend workshops and conferences, and the lack of resources to apply a resource to action on the ground.

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Second, knowledge resources are often developed in English or not adapted to a country's cultural, social, or political context. Translation is important not only into local languages, but also to tailor tools for different stakeholders, including those who do not speak the "climate change language." If knowledge resources are not understood by the relevant audiences needed to implement a country's climate goals, those resources will have limited usefulness.

Finally, there is a lot more effort being put into developing knowledge tools than to building capacity to use them or analyzing how and why they are being used. Institutional funding models prioritize the development of new knowledge tools and websites, while leaving little budget for impact assessment, time to create lasting relationships, or convening people around the knowledge captured in resources. As such, there is not enough opportunity for those producing and using the knowledge resources to work together to improve their efficacy and relevance, or for the face-to-face interaction that can help turn knowledge into action.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD KNOWLEDGE RESOURCE?

With these challenges in mind, how should we modify knowledge resources to increase their influence and impact? There are four criteria to keep in mind:

Knowledge resources should be relevant to decision makers. Country representatives cited this as a particularly important consideration, especially given that knowledge resources are often global products but need to be applied to national or local contexts. Similarly, resources need to fit agendas of stakeholders with different priorities. For example, a relevant resource for an environment minister is different than for a finance minister or the private sector.

Knowledge resources need to be trustworthy. The technical evidence and analysis used in developing resources should be scientifically sound, but this is not necessarily enough to make a resource trustworthy. In addition, the producers or communicators of knowledge resources need to build trust with decision-makers for those decision-makers to trust their knowledge products.

The process of producing knowledge resources should appropriately consider different values and opposing views. This is particularly important in the case of resources produced by developed countries for the needs of developing ones. Countries look for tools that fit national circumstances in a way that is sensitive to cultural, political, and economic realities.

Knowledge resources need to be easy to obtain and easy to use. For an online tool to be accessible, it should be easily downloadable, and cost should not be a barrier. For a physical tool, such as a workshop, there must be personnel and funds available to facilitate attendance. To be effective, resources must be in a language and pitched at a technical level that the user is comfortable with and should be directly linked to action. Technical assistance and capacity building support is needed to ensure uptake of knowledge.

WHO EXACTLY USES KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES?

Applying knowledge resources to climate action involves a complex ecosystem of government institutions at both the national and subnational levels, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, research institutes, consultants, and the public. Low-to-middle income countries often rely on intermediaries to help overcome the challenges outlined above. This often includes a reliance on embedded consultants, national universities, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities, such as workshops and trainings. The peer-to-peer

element is particularly impactful, enabling the sharing of information, good practices, and strategies between countries facing similar challenges.

BRIDGING THE KNOWLEDGE-ACTION GAP

As has been outlined above, the scientific rigor of a knowledge resource is not enough to guarantee its translation into action on the ground. Perhaps the resource is not known to potential users, or not well-suited to national context. Maybe the technical jargon is inaccessible, or there might not be capacity to support its use. In some cases, global resources or data are not considered trustworthy by national governments.

To bridge this knowledge-action gap, knowledge producers need to think more holistically about their products. The process in which knowledge resources are used is just as important as the resource itself and should be a core consideration in any tool's development. There are three major strategies to getting knowledge resources into use: dissemination, knowledge brokering, and knowledge co-production.

Dissemination, by far the most common way that resources for climate action are shared, refers to one-directional distribution: knowledge producers push out information to users. Communication strategies can be improved by using clear language tailored to the users, improving visuals and infographics, and communicating resources with relevant messaging. For example, CDKN's [What's in it for...](#) series distills the key messages of the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report for Africa, South Asia, Small Island Developing States, and Latin America. These reports are accompanied by media toolkits to further help communicate the messages (including infographics, presentations, and photos).

Knowledge brokering is the facilitation of knowledge transfer across research, policy, and practice. Knowledge brokers, who can be individuals or organizations, break down the boundaries between the production and use of resources. They bring the full scope of resources and options to the attention of decision-makers and often facilitate exchanges between those who produce and use knowledge.

Knowledge brokering can include **knowledge curation services** to help guide users to resources most relevant to their specific needs and contexts. For example, the [NDC Partnership's Knowledge Portal](#) draws together, in a consistently tagged and easily searchable platform, the most relevant resources from its Partners and other leading institutions.

Convening and **collaborating** are also useful methods of knowledge brokering. Convening brings together stakeholders to develop a common understanding of a problem and collaborating enables them to jointly find solutions. The [LEDS GP regional platforms and cross-cutting working groups](#) are examples where policymakers and practitioners are working together to tackle common challenges through peer-learning, technical assistance, and the collaborative production of knowledge resources.

Translation, another knowledge brokering activity, is critical for many users. One dimension of this is linguistic – most tools are produced in English, and those involved in implementation struggle to use them if they are not available in local languages. In addition, tools need to accommodate users from different technical and sectoral backgrounds, as well as of differing capacities and interests. Most internal audiences will not be familiar with

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climate jargon, and will use the vocabularies of finance, agriculture, forestry, etc. as fits their expertise. Knowledge resources need to reflect these vocabularies if they are to resonate. [UNDP's Climate Public Expenditure and Institutional Review \(CPEIR\)](#) is an example of a tool translated for finance ministers; it expresses qualitative policies in terms of quantitative budget, allowing for factual debate and a clear definition of financial resource needs.

Knowledge co-production draws together the producers and users in the creation of a knowledge resource. In contrast to knowledge dissemination, there is a multi-directional flow of information between numerous knowledge sources, and no distinction between users and producers is made.

For instance, the [NAP Global Network](#)'s Country Support Hubs and in-country support programs respond directly to countries' needs for advancing their National Adaptation Plan (NAP) processes and co-produce knowledge resources based on this technical support. Each multi-stage process is not planned at the outset, but instead evolves based on country response and demand. The country context has been so integral to the final learning that a generic stand-alone product has not been built.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTIONS

Even once the right knowledge resources are developed and in the right hands, capacity constraints can still hinder their application into climate action.

Investment in long-term capacity-building is needed to build up the skill-sets to make effective use of knowledge resources. Where capacity building efforts should be targeted is not always obvious. When countries rely on national intermediaries (i.e. national research institutions and universities) to source, interpret, and validate knowledge resources for them, focusing capacity building efforts on these intermediaries can be an effective way to build sustained capacity. For instance, to improve national capacity on green economy principles, [UN PAGE has been working with Mongolian universities](#) on integrating green economy concepts and approaches into tertiary programs and curricula.

Working relationships between subject experts and government officials can also be effective ways to facilitate the translation and application of technical resources to local contexts and expand their usefulness in decision-making. For instance, the [NDC Cluster Helpdesk](#) provides developing country government officials (and those supporting them) with on-request technical assistance from experts on specific NDC-related challenges.

Whether it be between users and producers of knowledge, representatives from multiple countries, or various institutions, one common recommendation raised across the Partnership was for more *face-to-face interactions* (or its virtual equivalent). This includes trainings, conferences, and even just picking up the phone to ask advice of peers. Personal exchanges breed trust, a critical factor to bridge the knowledge-action gap, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities are valuable knowledge resources themselves.

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