

Asset Based Community Development and Pro-poor Asset-based Climate Change Adaptation: Integrating two approaches to a climate change adaptation project in the tenancy sector



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SUSTAINING RENTAL LIFE SERIES NOTE

The Briefing Paper series of the '**Rental housing, climate change and adaptive capacity: a case study of Newcastle NSW**' project seeks to provide readers with access to current research on rental sector adaptation to climate change. Briefing Papers produced by the project team are working documents that provide a forum on theoretical, methodological and practical issues related to climate change adaptation in rental housing. The project is funded by the National Climate Change Adaptation Facility (NCCARF) for 2012. The publication as a 'Briefing Paper' does not preclude subsequent publication in scholarly journals, books or reports. Unless otherwise stated, 'Rental housing, climate change and adaptive capacity' publications are presented as contributions to debate and discussion and represent our developing thinking about the research. We are hoping that they may facilitate feedback from readers, researchers, renters and housing managers.

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1. Summary

Assets can be natural, physical, social, or financial qualities which can be mobilised in order to adapt to climate change.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) assists people in identifying their assets and enhances their ability to meet their needs.

Pro-poor Asset-based Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA) recognises the role of assets in enhancing resilience, and that other factors such as age, gender or poverty are factors in greater vulnerability and hence reduced resilience.

Scoping assets enables people to recognise their adaptive capacity and reveals barriers to adaptation, such as the role of institutions and government.

This research project integrates PACCA and ABCD frameworks to explore and strengthen the adaptive capacity of low-income tenants in Newcastle, NSW.

2. Introduction

Throughout the world, low-income groups are the most at risk from extreme weather events and other negative impacts of climate change (Moser 2011; Stanley 2009). There are a variety of climate change adaptation strategies currently being carried out that seek to increase the resilience of low-income groups to these ill-effects.

In Australia, low-income housing tenants are often forgotten when it comes to strategies that seek to lessen the impact of climate change on households. This research project seeks to understand

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the adaptive capacity of public and private tenants by asking:

- What adaptation strategies are tenants, housing managers and landlords currently undertaking?
- What assets do tenants, housing managers and landlords bring to adaptation?
- What are some of the barriers to tenants being able to better adapt?
- How might landlords, renters, governments, NGOs and real estate agents work together to strengthen the adaptive capacity of low-income tenants in Australia?

These questions come out of an understanding of public and private housing tenants (as well as their landlords and housing managers) as active agents (Mee 2009) with the capacities, skills and assets that can assist in their ability to adapt to climate change. By focusing on the assets of tenants, this project reflects both an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and a Pro-Poor Asset-based Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA) approach.

The purpose of this briefing paper is to explore what the ABCD and PACCA approaches offer to understandings of the adaptive capacity of low-income tenants. It will explain how the project '*Rental housing, climate change and adaptive capacity: a case study of Newcastle, NSW*' is bringing these two approaches together to examine and strengthen the adaptive capacity of low-income tenants in Newcastle NSW.

Most low-income people already have the capacity to adapt to climate change,

and are adapting to climate change in some way (Moser 2011). The role of the two methodological approaches used in this project, ABCD and PACCA, is to identify and mobilise these capacities to increase the ability of people in the rental sector to adapt to climate change.

3. Asset Based Community Development

What are assets?

Assets... are not simply resources that people use in building livelihoods: they are assets that give them the capability to be and to act (Bebbington 1999).

Assets are the “natural, physical, social, financial and human capital” (Moser 2011) that enable people to act and meet their needs. Assets “give meaning” and grant people the “power to act and to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources” (Bebbington 1999). The more assets a person has, the greater their resilience and the less vulnerable they are to the ill-effects of climate change (Moser 2011).

What is ABCD?

ABCD is a community development theory, model and practice that has been developed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) for a United States context. ABCD aims to enable people to identify their own assets and envision ways they can use them to meet their own needs and the needs of their community (Haines and Green 2012). ABCD facilitates the creation of new stories and meanings that help communities recognise their strengths,

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challenging problematic constructions of places (or people) as deficient (Ennis and West 2010; see also Bankoff 2001).

This community development strategy starts with what is present in the community, the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993).

Often community development is practiced in a way where the focus is on finding help from outside experts (Gibson-Graham 2006; Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). This has the potential to create a cycle of dependency on these experts and further disadvantage communities (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). It is particularly unhelpful when the process of seeking expert help reinforces the stereotype of particular places or groups as being “needy” or disadvantaged (Cameron and Gibson 2005).

The ABCD model seeks to prevent communities from becoming dependent, so that they seek help from experts as an (informed) second step rather than as an immediate course of action (Gibson-Graham 2006). ABCD is based on an understanding that “every single person has capacities, abilities and gifts” (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Ennis and West (2010) summarise what they see as the four key principles of ABCD:

...change must come from within the community; development must build upon the capacities and assets which exist within the community; change should be relationship driven, and change should be oriented towards sustainable community growth.

As a capacity-building tool, ABCD is most often used at the level of a community group, neighbourhood or association and as such, community-based organisations play a central role in facilitating ABCD (Haines and Green 2012).

4. Pro-poor Asset-based Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA).

What is PACCA?

PACCA has been applied most commonly in developing countries, but is applicable to any context where marginalised groups are encountering the challenges posed by climate change. Similar to ABCD, PACCA (Moser 2011; Prowse and Scott 2008; Moser and Satterthwaite 2008b) focuses on people’s capacities: the assets of individuals and groups which can enable them to adapt to climate change.

Adaptation raises important questions not only about the types and aims of responses, but also who bears any costs, who is involved and who benefits (Prowse and Scott 2008).

The term *pro-poor* encapsulates the emphasis of this framework on those more vulnerable to climate change impacts. Vulnerability can be defined in Folke’s (2006) sense as lowered resilience, which in turn implies loss of adaptability. Poor socio-economic conditions, and social responses to gender, ethnicity or age can lead to reduced resilience and hence reduced adaptive capacity (Moser and Satterthwaite 2008b). A consequence of these conditions, and thus the more immediate cause of reduced resilience

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(see Briefing Paper No.2) is a lack of assets:

One of the most important factors shaping the adaptive capacity of individuals, households and communities is their access to and control over natural, human, social, physical, and financial resources (CARE International 2009, citing the IPCC Working Group 2, 2001. Third Assessment Report, Annex B: Glossary of Terms).

People who have minimal access to the resources they need to prevent, prepare for, and recover from severe weather events and rising costs associated with mitigation strategies are the most vulnerable. This is shown in the literature, highlighting past and future challenges faced by low-income groups:

'Studies of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras showed that the hurricane exacerbated asset inequalities as the poor lost a greater share of assets in the disaster and recovered at a slower rate than the non-poor' (Heltberg et al. 2009).

Particular barriers for low-income renters include lower quality housing, with less effective heating and cooling, disincentives for either landlords or tenants to make significant improvements to housing, and lack of insurance (Sullivan 2007).

Coastal communities such as Newcastle often have high numbers of non-resident taxpayers and transitory populations resulting in a lack of community cohesion in times of crisis:

... strong social networks and support systems are needed to communicate information about dangers and to

assist in times of emergency. The elderly, low income, renters, and residents of mobile home parks and similar vulnerable constructions, will need the most policy attention to assure overall community safety' (Gurran et al. 2008).

A PACCA framework involves understanding vulnerabilities as well as assets (Moser 2011). This is particularly important in contexts where institutions and governments are unwilling or unable to assist poor communities in their efforts to adapt (Prowse and Scott 2008). By being pro-poor, PACCA is guided by the principle of climate justice, a principle which is explored briefly below.

Justice as a guiding principle of PACCA

Pro-poor adaptation ... is an opportunity to ensure that climate change policy is just and fair (Prowse and Scott 2008).

How do people respond to climate change? Who is responsible? Who benefits, who is disadvantaged? These questions can help guide responses and ethical thinking around strategies for adaptation to climate change.

Within the climate change adaptation literature, fairness has been an important principle. For example, the following four climate change justice principles have been proposed by Adger et al (2006):

1. *avoiding dangerous climate change* that is, mitigation rather than adaptation
2. *forward looking responsibility*, where those responsible for

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- emissions compensate others
3. putting the most vulnerable first
 4. *fair participation for all* – participation by those most vulnerable to and affected by decision making about adaptation.

These values seek to guide how frameworks such as PACCA intervene in adaptation policy and practice (see also Prowse and Scott 2008).

A PACCA framework is founded on the principle that, as climate change is mostly the result of the actions of the rich, poor people should not be further disadvantaged by climate change. Instead poor people ought to benefit more from climate adaptation practices and policies than the rich (Prowse and Scott 2008).

More broadly, climate justice frameworks raise the question of who should be held responsible for compensating those at risk from the ill effects of climate change. Questions around climate change often focus on retrospective compensation (Vanderheiden 2009). For example climate justice frameworks that focus on *adaptation* address the question of who should compensate whom for the harm caused by climate change. How should the people who have played a minimal role in causing climate change be compensated for the harm they experience because of the actions of others (Vanderheiden 2009)? On the other hand, *mitigation* approaches focus more on how to distribute resources fairly and justly (Vanderheiden 2009). Action on mitigation and adaptation originates in different arenas:

...mitigation can be driven as a national agenda, promoted by

international agreement, whereas effective adaptation needs to be locally driven, in part because adaptation measures must be rooted in the particulars of each local economic, social, political and ecological context (Moser and Satterthwaite 2008a).

5. Combining ABCD and Pro-poor Asset-based Climate Change Adaptation to study the adaptive capacity of rental housing in Newcastle, NSW.

Troubling ABCD and the importance of context-specific adaptation

While providing frameworks for uncovering the “gifts” or strengths of groups who may be marginalised ...ABCD does not directly confront issues related to power and oppression (Ennis and West 2010).

ABCD has recently been criticised as not taking broad scale forms of injustice such as class, ethnicity, gender and age into account when seeking to mobilise assets and understand reasons for local disadvantage (Ennis and West 2010). Ennis and West (2010) argue that ABCD fails to challenge structural or macro-level injustices; ABCD needs to address these broader structural issues in order to fully mobilise the strengths and assets of a community. They argue that a way to address these concerns is to combine ABCD with a social network theory approach.

The argument for not only taking account of the diversity of local responses to climate change adaptation but also being aware of broader policy intervention and possibilities has been made by Kates and Wilbanks (2003):

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...residents can alter the emissions emanating from their homes but only within a small range governed by who built the structure and how and when they did so...[R]enters in multifamily dwellings have little influence over such issues as insulation. On the other hand, even such external decisions as a distant utility office's choice of location for an electricity generating plant may have been influenced by local desires for economic development or by local demand (Kates and Wilbanks 2003).

In this project, we argue it is important to acknowledge the context-specific and multiple ways injustice is performed, particularly when it comes to the implementation of state-based policy frameworks, or the absence of frameworks that could potentially assist tenants or low-income groups meet their needs. The structural issues affecting low-income tenants, their assets and networks are context-specific, but affected by regional, state and national frameworks and connections.

It could be argued that structural injustices can be challenged by transforming how people and groups understand themselves, as proposed by the ABCD framework. By acknowledging the capacity and assets of people, we acknowledge their ability to challenge injustices in their own lives, through everyday practices. However this is not the only way to challenge structural injustices. Rather, it is a way of saying that responses need to be contextually appropriate.

In relation to climate change adaptation, we argue that utilising a PACCA framework helps identify broader structural issues that cause climate

injustice and inhibit the ability of tenants to adapt to climate change.

Moreover, by being pro-poor, our approach is founded on an understanding that climate change should not further disadvantage low income tenants: rather they should benefit from adaptation strategies (Prowse and Scott 2008).

By combining the ABCD and PACCA frameworks both the assets that enable tenants to adapt to climate change, and the barriers that prevent tenant adaptation will be explored, in order to think through responses which address a broad spectrum of issues connected to vulnerability and adaptive capacity. Applying this approach to a particular region or community will enable us to collaboratively develop adaptive practices tailored to the needs of that community (Smit and Wandel 2006).

This approach recognises the importance of keeping the *context* of adaptive measures in the research frame to enhance adaptive capacity. It highlights the role of responses that are grounded in the local but operate as a coordinated response at many levels.

Participation in adaptation

Both the PACCA and ABCD frameworks highlight the importance of participation in discussions and decision-making. Other change programs which have successfully used participatory approaches include Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Methodologies (Suarez et al. 2008), and Participatory Rural Appraisal, which is designed so that rural people can share and analyse their knowledge in order to plan for the future (Prowse et al. 2009).

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This project will involve tenants, housing managers and landlords as advisers and providers of information on climate change adaptation, and will help all of these key actors to work collaboratively on solutions through focus group discussions.

Scoping studies

The community assets approach:

- starts with what is present in the community
- concentrates on the agenda-building and problem-solving capacity of the residents
- stresses local determination, investment, creativity, and control (Michigan State University 1998-1999).

Community Asset Mapping may have very little to do with spatial mapping 'and much more to do with a community survey and ... a process that will fully mobilize a community to use its assets around a vision and a plan to solve its own problems' (Michigan State University 1998-1999).

In ABDC, inventories are made for individual people that document skills in areas such as office administration, food preparation, construction, transportation, child care and other capacities (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Skills inventories are made for organisations and associations at the local level where the various types of associations present their role and their capacities are scoped (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993).

The interviews and focus groups conducted as part of this project will be

aimed at gaining this kind of inventory of assets from tenants, housing managers and landlords.

Local institutions and community organisations also play a role in ABCD and are recognised for their various assets such as physical buildings and other resources that can assist a community (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993).

... serious – even catastrophic and irreversible – damage to natural systems from climate change need not result in catastrophic and irreversible damage to humans...It all depends on the effectiveness of societies' adaptive capacity, which is shaped by policies and institutions (Heltberg et al. 2009, emphasis added).

Ideally, an institution is a site 'where signals of change are detected and reacted to...where knowledge and understanding accumulate – in sort, where learning is possible in a changing world' (Holling 1996). Hence this project will also examine, through the eyes of key actors, the role of institutions. Recommendations to institutions will be an important outcome of the project.

6. Introducing the project

The research for this project will be conducted in two sites in Newcastle, NSW, a coastal location expected to confront significant problems caused by sea-level rise and increased storm and flood activity due to climate change. These two sites are:

- Inner-urban Newcastle, which contains a significant number of

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medium-density low-income public and private rental properties

- The Toronto district of Lake Macquarie, which contains low-density and low-income housing.

The housing stock in these two locations is indicative of most housing in Australian cities.

The purpose of the research is to strengthen the capacity of public and private housing tenants to adapt to climate change. To do this, the research methodology provides for participation by a range of actors involved in the rental housing sector. This will occur as follows:

1. A [steering committee](#) will be established comprised of representatives from housing NSW, local government, NGOs and real estate representatives.
2. Semi-structured [interviews](#) will be conducted with up to 20 renters from each tenure type in each location (up to 80 in total) alongside interviews with housing managers/landlords (up to 20 in total with 10 in each location) and 10 with Housing NSW staff. Interviews will discuss existing sustainability practices, social, economic and material assets for adaptation (housing and infrastructure conditions, economic or ethical motivation for change, community networks, local knowledge, capacity to act cooperatively), barriers to change and future possibilities.
3. [Focus groups](#) will be held with tenants, property agents/landlords and housing agencies in order to jointly address barriers to action, and develop new strategies for climate change adaptation in the

rental sector.

4. [YouTube clips](#) and websites will be developed to communicate innovative tenant adaptations. These publicly available resources will be a way to communicate with the broader community, and are an important part of the project's end-user engagement strategy.
5. A [best-practice guide](#) for real estate agents/housing providers and a [community implementation guide](#) for households and community groups will be developed to further communicate the results of the study.

7. Conclusions

While a PACCA framework has been pioneered in developing countries, the principles on which it is based are applicable to rental sector housing in Australia, as this sector is characterised by low-income households and low standard housing. However, the application of a PACCA framework in conjunction with ABCD to climate change adaptation raises important ethical, theoretical and methodological questions, such as climate justice, and the relationship between assets and vulnerability. These issues are explored further in Briefing Paper No.2.

In integrating ABCD and PACCA approaches, the project aims:

- to focus on both assets and vulnerabilities
- enable contributions from all key actors, including tenants and housing managers/landlords.

Consequently, it is expected that the project will produce:

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- a series of recommendations for government, business, and community groups on effective intervention strategies to enhance adaptation responses in the sector
- a series of best practice guides for housing managers and communities, and best practice video clips showcasing innovative tenant adaptations
- a discussion of the applicability and limitations of an asset-based methodology to examining adaptive capacity in rental housing sector in Australia
- a summary and interpretation of the capacities, barriers and enablers of tenants and rental housing managers/landlords towards building resilience to climate change
- an analysis of linking strategies and their contribution to fostering an enabling environment for protecting and adapting assets and capacities in the rental sector.

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