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Climate Systems
National Environmental Science Program
Enabling best practice adaptation

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What enables climate change adaptation?

Reducing the risks of climate change and adapting to a new climate, requires a complex social and economic response. It often involves decision making under a range of uncertainties, balancing different people's and organisation's interests and requires significant social and economic investment. In 2023, we set out to understand factors enabling climate change adaptation through a systematic literature review.

Approach

The review took a systematic approach and focussed on empirical studies of adaptation occurring in human systems. Literature was identified by searching the Scopus database for papers using the terms *enablers*, *drivers* or *determinants* and *climate adaptation*. Screening of titles and abstracts was conducted to remove papers which were not relevant.

Results

Our review found that some enabling factors were emphasised more frequently than others: including resources (particularly financial), awareness of climate risks and responses, leadership, coordination, and the support of higher-level institutions.

PROACTIVE LEADERS

Individuals who champion adaptation in their work in government or private sector, or local communities who drive bottom up approaches.

SUFFICIENT RESOURCING

Financial, human and natural resources to drive forward adaptation, with particular emphasis on dedicated adaptation funding.

ADAPTATION KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge of climate risk and possible adaptation responses, communicated in a way that is tangible and applicable.

COORDINATION

Horizontal and vertical coordination between and within levels of government to allow for efficient adaptation action.

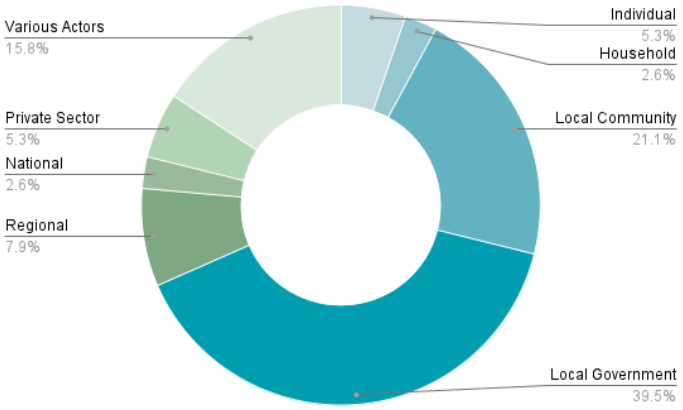
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Alignment of goals, policies and priorities to support a clear adaptation agenda, allowing for adaptation work to progress and promoting action from individuals.

Our analyses also highlighted a number of gaps in the literature that require further investigation. These gaps include limited understanding of factors that can affect change in regional and national governments, in the private sector and in non-local not for profit and non-government organisations. This review also highlighted important links between the enablers and barriers to climate change adaptation which need further consideration.

Next steps

We are now seeking to understand how the current knowledge might inform a framework for enabling climate change adaptation; considering the idea that enablers could be classified as either 'conditions' that build a supporting environment for adaptation, or 'catalysts', that have an active influence on the adaptation process.



The papers reviewed were unevenly distributed across actors, with an emphasis on actors implementing adaptation at a local scale.

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