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Analytical Framework: Carnegie Middle East Program Workshop on Climate Adaptation, Governance, and Justice

In December 2025, scholars working on Carnegie’s project on Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Governance in the Middle East and North Africa convened civil society actors from the Gulf, Levant, and North Africa to provide an open space for in-depth analysis and comparisons of climate adaptation challenges; this framing piece outlines the analytical framework guiding those discussions.

Across the Middle East and North Africa, climate change is not a future environmental concern. It is a present development emergency. [Countries](#) contributing the least to global greenhouse gas emissions tend to face the most severe and accelerating climate impacts—water scarcity, food insecurity, coastal erosion, salinization, extreme heat, wildfire risk, land degradation, and the collapse of livelihoods in fishing and agriculture. Yet adaptation financing covers only a fraction of what is needed, and mitigation-first, COP-centric funding cycles continue to crowd out the adaptation funding that high-vulnerability countries urgently require.

At the same time, national policies, strategies, and international commitments often fail to translate into effective local implementation, creating a persistent gap between strategy and operational risk reduction on the ground. Participation remains ad hoc or reactive. Communities directly affected by extractive activities, environmental degradation, and climate transition policies often lack institutionalized channels to influence decisions related to natural resource governance, environmental management, and development planning. When institutional dialogue channels are weak, social mobilization becomes the primary means through which citizens articulate grievances and demand accountability.

This area of research warrants attention because adaptation outcomes are shaped not only by environmental risk, but by governance gaps. Adaptation is still planned too far from the people who live and work in vulnerable regions. Policy often favors what is easiest to count or process

bureaucratically, while local knowledge, tenure arrangements, ecosystem services, and community-led management remain overlooked. When these realities are ignored, interventions can deepen vulnerability instead of reducing it.

The workshop therefore centers climate adaptation as a governance question: how to integrate science, local action, and partnerships into sustainable governance systems, and how to move communities from beneficiaries to co-leaders in climate governance. It examines decentralized decisionmaking, institutional collaboration across civil society organizations, governments, and donors, and intermediary financing models that bridge gaps between donor priorities, national policies, and community needs.

The analytical framework guiding this convening focuses on four interrelated questions:

1. How can meaningful participation be institutionalized rather than remaining ad hoc?

How can permanent dialogue mechanisms, structured consultation platforms, and sustained multi-stakeholder coordination ensure that community inputs are formally documented, responded to, and reflected in policy outcomes—especially for groups historically excluded from decisionmaking?

2. How can national climate commitments translate into effective local implementation?

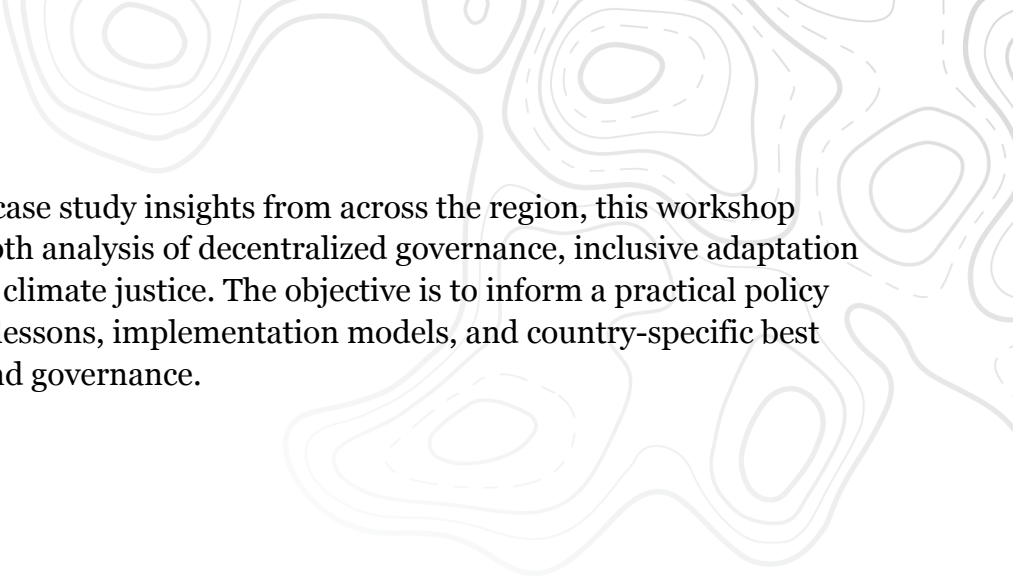
What mechanisms strengthen vertical integration across governance levels so that municipal reporting channels, local evidence, and community-level preparedness inform national climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies?

3. How can adaptation finance and monitoring systems align with local governance realities?

What are the structural barriers to accessing climate finance at the community level? How can funding mechanisms support participatory governance processes, route resources directly to local actors, and invest in long-term monitoring, data management, and evidence-based policymaking?

4. Whose knowledge shapes adaptation planning and success?

How do rules around data access, environmental monitoring, and official narratives influence who bears the costs of change and who benefits? How can ecological baselines, continuous monitoring, and community-generated data be treated as core evidence rather than marginal inputs?



By consolidating and comparing case study insights from across the region, this workshop provides an open space for in-depth analysis of decentralized governance, inclusive adaptation models, institutional reform, and climate justice. The objective is to inform a practical policy brief that highlights transferable lessons, implementation models, and country-specific best practices in climate adaptation and governance.