POLICY BRIEF

The development-climate change nexus in Morocco: Roadmap for the Belgian Development Cooperation

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"How to better integrate the environmental dimension in the Belgian development cooperation in Morocco - Nexus development/climate"

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At a glance

Morocco clearly illustrates an internationally recognized imperative of conciliating development programmes and actions with the environment and climate change ones. According to the country's 'Projet de Stratégie Nationale de Développement Durable 2030', Morocco faces interconnected socio-environmental challenges, social vulnerabilities and rising inequalities in a context of acute climatic variability and change. The Belgian Development Cooperation has embarked on the challenge to work together with Moroccan actors towards addressing intertwining socio-environmental issues and as such giving a renewed relevance to its development agendas in the country. In this context, ADAPTtoDEVELOP, acronym for this PSR project, applied a participatory research methodology to co-produce a roadmap defining Morocco's priorities in terms of the development-climate change nexus, and related strategic and operational steps for the Belgian Development cooperation. This roadmap is presented throughout this policy brief.

Contents

- What is and how to navigate the development-climate change nexus?
- Principles to operationalise the development-climate change nexus
- The development-climate change nexus in Morocco
- Focal areas for development-climate change action in Morocco
- Strategic & operational entry points for the Belgian Development Cooperation

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Documents of the ADAPTtoDEVELOP project

Deliverable 1. Sustainable adaptation principles for the development-climate change nexus

Deliverable 2. The ADAPTtoDEVELOP 'pilot domains' in Morocco

Deliverable 3. Co-production of roadmaps on the development-climate change nexus in Morocco: Methods, results and lessons learned from ADAPTtoDEVELOP (methodology and workshops' results)

Deliverable 4. Development-climate change nexus in Morocco: Roadmap for the Belgian Development Cooperation

Deliverable 5. Synthesis Report ADAPTtoDEVELOP

Deliverable 6. ADAPTtoDEVELOP conclusions and recommendations (Outreach document)

All documents and project updates can be found in our ADAPTtoDEVELOP website here.

Introduction

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change converged to consolidate an international consensus on the need for integrated development, environment and climate change agendas. The Directorate General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) has embarked on the challenge to work together with Moroccan actors towards addressing intertwining development-climate change issues and giving a renewed relevance to the development agendas in the country. The latest IPCC report has confirmed the intuition of the DGD on the need and urgency to engage with the development-climate change nexus in Morocco: the just published report 'Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability'[1] (27 February 2022) characterizes the Mediterranean region as 'hotspot for highly interconnected climate risks' due to its particular combination of multiple strong climate hazards and high vulnerability related to development aspects. At the same time, the European Green Deal, which defines the EU climate strategy to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and aims to make Europe the first mover in international climate policy, has multifaceted development implications for the Global South and calls for novel EU-African partnerships to deal with the development-climate change nexus. For instance, in light of the climate policy initiative 'Farm to Fork', Morocco needs to comply with new, more sustainable agricultural standards in order to remain a competitive African agriculture exporter to the EU[2]. ADAPTtoDEVELOP, acronym for this PSR project, applied a participatory research methodology aiming at helping the DGD to define strategic and operational steps to dive into Morocco's development challenges considering in a substantial way environmental and climate change aspects. This Policy Brief presents recommendations of ADAPTtoDEVELOP suggesting a development-climate change nexus roadmap for the Belgian Development Cooperation in Morocco.

What is and how to navigate the development-climate change nexus?

Long-lasting climatic changes are underway and pose major threats to development aspirations and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), making climate change adaptation (CCA) critical for development[3]. 'Good' development that addresses, among others, issues of poverty and inequalities, is often considered a starting point for CCA and the main way to address an existing 'adaptation deficit', which refers to the incapacity of many vulnerable countries and groups to cope with and adapt to existing climate risks[3]. At the same time, certain development interventions can create lock-ins of vulnerability and risks that are difficult and expensive to change, while poorly planned CCA can lead to unsustainable development trajectories[4]. These evidence-based statements summarize the development-climate change nexus and call development actors to engage with development efforts that are integrated and mutually supportive with CCA strategies and action[5], i.e., development efforts that plausibly reduce future risk in line with sustainable development principles (creating synergies with CCA) or at least do not increase future risk (avoiding trade-offs). Box 1 presents a list of questions that are the 'entry points' to the roadmap discussed in this policy brief and intend to support the Belgian Development Cooperation in navigating and engaging with the development-climate change nexus (see also ADAPTtoDEVELOP Deliverable 1).

Box 1. Entry points to the roadmap

- What are current and future climate risks? How do the communities of interest experience climate change and assess potential damages?
- Does current development support reducing (or at least does not increase) climate risk (i.e., aligns with CCA needs)?
- Does current development (re)produce vulnerability to climate and environmental change? How?
- Which are the social groups more vulnerable to climate change and why? Are those groups included in the development initiatives?
- How do development actions interact with CCA? What are development actions that could reduce vulnerability to climate risk (i.e., act as CCA)?

While climate change impacts are being felt at an ever-increasing pace especially in low- and middle-income countries, and numerous climate risk assessments are being implemented at different spatial scales within these countries to facilitate targeted CCA[6], the link with development aspects (both challenges and strategies)

and the role of development initiatives in mediating risks has to be better understood and executed. In middle-income countries like Morocco, the high dependency on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture remains. Moreover, as national economies grow fast and industrialise, economic interests can greatly overwhelm environmental needs, adding to the complexity of the development-climate change nexus the challenge of sustainability[7]. More than development support for poverty reduction that aligns with CCA, Morocco seems to need partnerships that will foster (also) environmental awareness and inclusive, climate-resilient and sustainable development[8].

Principles to operationalise the development-climate change nexus

ADAPTtoDEVELOP has identified a set of 'sustainable adaptation' principles that development efforts – including those of the Belgian Development Cooperation's – can follow in terms of methodologies and content to ensure that these are integrated and mutually supportive with CCA strategies and actions. In the context of ADAPTtoDEVELOP, we define sustainable adaptations as those development efforts that strive for simultaneously supporting sustainable development and CCA, building synergies and accounting for trade-offs therein (see ADAPTtoDEVELOP Deliverable 1). These principles can be used as such when consolidating programmes and projects but have also been carefully embedded in the recommendations to the Belgian Development Cooperation in the last section of this policy brief.

TABLE 1 PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE ADAPTATION IN ADAPTTODEVELOP. SOURCE: AUTHORS BUILDING ON ERIKSEN ET AL., 2021, FUNDER ET AL. 2020, MCGRAY ET AL. 2007

Principles for sustainable adaptations	
1. Assess the climate risk context and the context for vulnerability to climate risks for current and future situation	Accompany development programmes and projects with climate and vulnerability risk assessments so that the development efforts are always positioned and assessed also against their contribution in addressing current and future climate risk and vulnerabilities.
2. Strive for inclusive participation in planning and implementation of development-climate change interventions	A focus on inclusive participatory governance for development and/or CCA interventions is necessary. The CCA community still struggles to engage with the governance issue, while development has long experience in this field. Attention to mechanisms that make people excluded/marginalised could be a valuable contribution in assessing and addressing drivers of vulnerability to climate risk and promote sustainable development at once.
3. Integrate local knowledge/culture both to assess climate risk and vulnerability, and decide on development-climate change interventions	Transdisciplinary risk and vulnerability assessments through a combination of climate data analysis and participatory methods could be key for integrating climate considerations in development agendas in a time and cost-efficient manner. Most importantly, they give an idea of what communities and social groups need and value most, which opens up the space to consider alternative socio-culturally sensitive development and adaptation agendas.
4. Beyond the 'community scale': acknowledge communities as heterogeneous to identify socially differentiated vulnerabilities	An inclusive development-climate change agenda requires awareness of the social, cultural, economic and political heterogeneity of a community or group. Communities have their own socio-economic and political inequalities, and these lead to socially differentiated vulnerabilities. This awareness should translate into attention and care for vulnerabilities (re)produced due to gender, intersectionality, class, ethnicity and other issues generating exclusion. At the same time, assessments and programmes need to consider the changing character of communities and localities. Culture and other social characteristics of different groups are not only diverse but also change over time.
5. Consider the full spectrum of CCA and ensure a good understanding of context-specific needs, moving beyond the 'adaptation deficit'	All components of the continuum are important and their relevance is context-specific. This means that development-climate change programmes should be tailored to the specific needs of each context and draw from some components of the continuum accordingly. This presupposes development efforts being accompanied by evidence-based climate risk assessments for the particular territories under question. At the same time, adaptation-driven interventions still focus on technical measures – it is on the expertise but also responsibility of the development actors to engage particularly with those more transformative actions.

6. Obtain a territorial, cross-sectoral and systemic approach in programme and project design	A territorial approach, somewhere at the regional scale between the national and local, means that the programme/project is contextualised according to territorial socio-ecological specificities. The focus then is the communities, their livelihoods and the interaction with the biophysical and socio-economic surroundings at multiple scales but also on the potential for territorial interactions in the form of mutual support and solidarity. This approach ensures that we move beyond a sectoral understanding of both development and CCA, and search for feedbacks and processes that could re-distribute vulnerability across society, sectors, space.

The development-climate change nexus in Morocco

Morocco clearly illustrates the imperative of conciliating development programmes and actions with the environment and climate change ones. According to the country's 'Projet de Stratégie Nationale de Développement Durable 2030', Morocco faces interconnected socio-environmental challenges, vulnerabilities and rising inequalities in a context of acute climatic variability and change. Here, we highlight highly important aspects of the development-climate change nexus in Morocco bringing together the findings of our participatory workshops, interviews, and literature review (see ADAPTtoDEVELOP Deliverables 2 and 3).

Water scarcity has been among the first impacts of climate change recognised in North African countries with extensive dryland areas such as Morocco[9]. Due to a combination of rising temperatures, more erratic rainfall and non-climatic stressors such as population growth, urban, industrial and tourism development, water-intensive crops and inadequate water governance[10], Morocco has experienced significant decrease in surface water and groundwater availability, and is now close to the threshold set by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for severe water stress[9]. The country is expected to become hotter and drier in the future, and as such drought and desertification are considered to be among the most alarming climate impacts; they are expected to increase risks of loss of livelihoods in agriculture (farmers and livestock owners), disease outbreaks, malnutrition, migration and conflicts over the use of natural resources[10] (e.g., between agriculture and energy production, between agriculture and tourism [11]). Furthermore, forest and biodiversity loss are expected to increase under climate change enhancing pressure to already degrading resources and vulnerable rural populations against the backdrop of internationally booming and ecologically intensive markets such as this of the argan oil [12]. Oasis ecosystems, currently disappearing at a fast rate, depend strongly on intricate interactions between human agricultural activity and ecology (e.g., through family-farm fruit tree cultivation, communal collection of dried palm leaves), and are thus particularly vulnerable to the combination of climate change and depopulation due to out-migration[12]. Additionally, sea level rise threatens territories of high social, economic, touristic and ecological values as it may impact much of the country's low-lying coastline and popular coastal cities[10]. The Moroccan coasts host 60% of the population, 90% of industrial activity, a large share of tourism, and significant natural reserves and biodiversity hotspots that are already under pressure from population growth due to rural-urban migration, housing and development, insufficient waste management, mining and overfishing[13]. The mass tourism along the coast is of particular interest to the development-climate change nexus: it is both highly exposed to climate change and of



high water- and energy-intensity exacerbating current and future competition over natural resources, while it contributes little to the local community development[12].

The vulnerability to current and future climate risks is largely defined by the country's development trajectory and varies across territories (Figure 1) and social groups. Rural communities remain considerably left behind in terms of poverty, access to education and health care, access to decision-making process, and access to public and private financial resources, compared to urban areas (although unemployment rates are lower). Thus, small rural farmers are significantly vulnerable to impacts of risks (floods, dry periods) because they receive limited public investment support and have only few resources with which to influence and increase their adaptive capacity. This holds particularly true for mountainous communities due to their remoteness[12,14,15]. Low levels of literacy and educational attainment – in particular vocational skills – combined with insufficient job creation to match a rapidly growing population, reduce youth employability and opportunities for diversifying incomes or shifting livelihoods away from agriculture and biological resources. Young migrants from rural areas might lack the skills to secure jobs of quality in urban areas; without alternatives, communities are pushed to overexploit local resources such as land, water, and pastures; further clear out forests for agricultural land; and overharvest local (wild) species either for own consumption or income generation further entrenching vulnerabilities to climate risks[12,14,16]. Finally, women in Morocco have historically played an important role in rural development. Male migration results in an increased exposure of women to climate risks due to their high involvement in agricultural activities. This high exposure in combination with the fact that women in Morocco, especially in rural areas, are disproportionately underserved in access to education, employment, health care, and political voice makes women a (still heterogeneous) social group of particular vulnerability to climate risks[12].

The World Bank Group (2021:10)[10] stresses that '[the increasing shortage of available water] is a result both of natural conditions (aridity and drought) and poor water management practices and decision-making (water scarcity and desertification), leading to increased water insecurity.' This statement highlights the important role of (water) governance (including actors, institutions and their interactions, decision-making, planning, and management) in defining the vulnerability of Moroccan territories and communities to water stress – and we would say more broadly – to climate risks. Indeed, interviews and participatory workshops that took place in the context of ADAPTtoDEVELOP identified the important role of governance in mediating socio-ecological interactions, and an inclusive, participatory and decentralised governance as essential – but lacking – element of a strategy addressing the development-climate change nexus in Morocco[12,17]. Strong centralized decision-making combined with a large government apparatus, limited coordination and cooperation among institutions, insufficient knowledge and awareness of the need for CCA and the opportunities that it brings for development creates a lack of flexibility and capacity to operate at the regional and local levels. The recent process of decentralization has not (yet) led to inclusive for citizens and civil society participatory governance and ownership at the regional and local levels.

Focal areas for development-climate change action in Morocco

Figure 2 illustrates crucial aspects of the development-climate change nexus in Morocco as these have been identified in ADAPTtoDEVELOP and briefly presented in the previous section of this policy brief. In this Figure, we stress the interactions between i) the climate hazard and impacts, ii) the exposed territories and communities, and iii) development and the physical and social vulnerabilities, to highlight that the development-climate change nexus in Morocco and beyond demands a systemic and integrative approach. In this sense, we would like to propose a specific way to read Figure 2: the focal areas for action are community- territorially-centred (e.g., mountainous rural communities based on subsistence mixed-mountain agriculture) – rather than sector-specific – and refer to forested regions, mountain regions, coasts, oases, agricultural areas and urban areas, the communities they host and their livelihoods. These focal areas are further defined in terms of development and CCA needs by constellations of relevant elements drawing from the climate hazards, from the development-vulnerability context (including physical/social vulnerability and the 'multisectoral domains') and from the intermediate impacts.

Although there are many different combinations that can be made, through our research in ADAPTtoDEVELOP we have identified five focal areas for development-climate change action in Morocco, which should be addressed with the common general aim of promoting sustainable livelihoods under climate change conditions, while considering 'external' or in other words broader socio-economic drivers and needs:

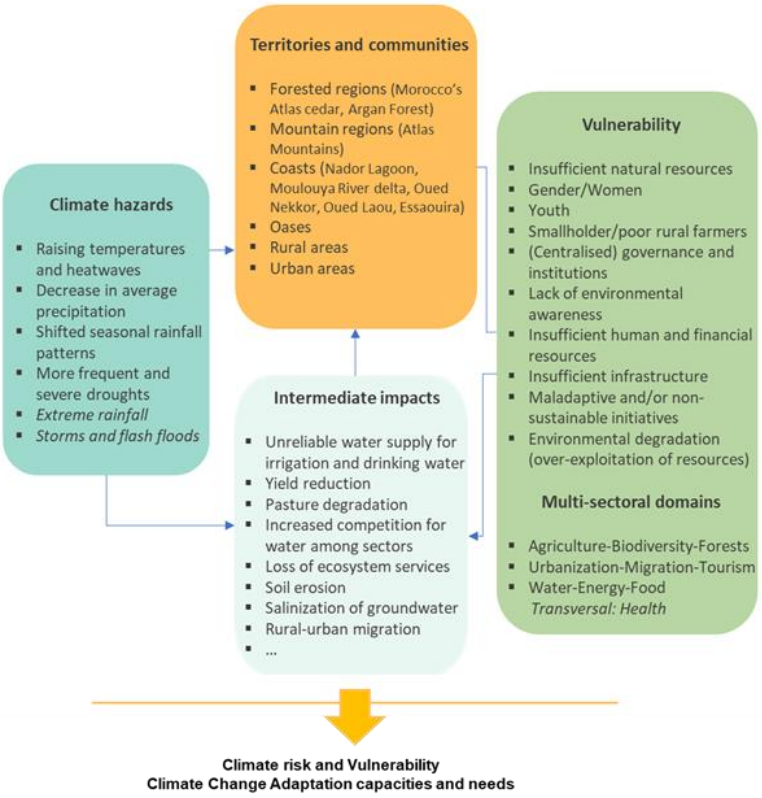


FIGURE 1 COMMUNITY- TERRITORIALLY-CENTRED FOCAL AREAS IN MOROCCO

- Invest on strengthening water governance systems; establish solidarity relationships between territories, through the integration of water governance across sectors and social groups, and of water management across all sources of water.
- Diversify and increase the sustainability of socio-economic activities present in the coast; and act proactively in the design and implementation of circular/green economy solutions and other CCA strategies relevant to stimulate more sustainable urbanization processes.
- Address gender inequality and women's vulnerability to climate and environmental change in rapidly changing rural socio-ecological territories such as the Argan Forest.
- Support local decision-makers and practitioners in the design and implementation of their different sustainability and CCA agendas, as a stepping stone towards an improved decentralisation and local institutional capacities; include civil society actors yet don't forget to support these groups with funding and information.
- Explore the potential of ecotourism and rural tourism as a way to combat rural-urban migration, enhance youth's opportunities for employment, diversify rural livelihoods, and promote more sustainable forms of tourism.

The approach we propose in order to define priority areas invites the Belgian Development Cooperation actors working with Morocco to obtain ex-ante a systemic perspective when identifying the development-climate change nexus issue of interest. This is also generally aligned with Morocco's priorities and approach since it recognizes climate change as a multisectoral and cross-cutting issue manifested according to the circumstances and specific features of the country's territorial entities[9]. The difference is that while Morocco implements a sectoral approach, we suggest to the Belgian Development Cooperation to work with communities/territories and/or 'multi-sectoral domains', i.e. clusters of environmental and socio-economic sectors and trends. This would permit to further enhance the systemic approach we strive for by considering the interactions, synergies and trade-offs included. According to our research, highly relevant for Morocco multi-sectoral domains are: (i) the Agriculture-Biodiversity-Forests, (ii) Urbanization-Migration-Tourism, and (iii) Water-Energy-Food with Health as transversal consideration. In ADAPTtoDEVELOP, we have analysed these multi-sectoral domains considering the community-territorially-specific manifestations and needs (see ADAPTtoDEVELOP Deliverable 2). This analysis could support the Belgian Development Cooperation actors both by providing more information about the specific domains but also by offering conceptual guidance on how to examine other multi-sectoral domains of relevance to Morocco.

Strategic & operational entry points for the Belgian Development Cooperation

As illustrated in its 2014 'Strategy Note on the Environment' and the 2017 'Climate Change Concept paper', the Belgian Development Cooperation has been systematically working on connecting the development with environmental agendas, with a particular focus on the challenge of climate change and building an approach of 'systematic climate mainstreaming' throughout programme and project cycles in Morocco and beyond. During the *consolidation* phase[21] of its development-climate change nexus mission, the Belgian Development Cooperation has established the necessary implementation and organisational foundations and has built significant expertise on the issue (see also the climate working group established in 2016). Capitalising on this experience allows then to transition to a *development* phase with more innovative approaches and the setting of more ambitious development-climate change agendas in the different countries where the Belgian Development Cooperation operates[21]. The recommendations presented here for Morocco have been developed with the view to support the Belgian Development Cooperation in this ambitious transition; they thus refer to both broader and more fundamental strategic entry points to more effectively engage with the development-climate change nexus, and to Morocco-specific actions to address the focal areas presented in the previous section.

1. The Belgian Development Cooperation's Strategy Note on the Environment (and the Climate Change Concept paper) can be renewed by making climate change an overarching and central focus of this strategy (rather than simply transversal secondary element and technical subfield as it currently portrays), and a key aim of the Belgian Development Cooperation. As our research has illustrated, 'business-as-usual' development is not an option against the backdrop of irreversible climate change, and it is the responsibility of development actors to reflect this in their framing of the development-climate change nexus and their narratives vis-à-vis countries such as Morocco. A clear, specific Strategy on Climate Change Adaptation (and mitigation) with tangible actions for CCA support can also be developed building on and expanding the initial mainstreaming efforts from 2017 onwards. This strategy should take into account the need to enhance capacities on the development climate-change nexus among Belgian development actors and institutions through i) creating opportunities for co-learning, ii) integrating sectoral programmes and projects, iii) developing climate risk and vulnerability assessments that go a step further from screening, tick-box exercises, iii) establishing novel partnerships and collaborations, and iv) designing, co-funding and implementing ambitious, complex pilot projects on the development-climate change nexus.

2. Creating opportunities for co-learning entails the provision to the different Belgian development actors of interactive teaching modules and simulation trainings on what climate change is and how it is interlinked with development (cooperation); where to find relevant climate information and how to use it; how to think through systematic steps aiming at defining concrete adaptation options at national, local and project levels, among others. These trainings should be both general and country-specific. In Morocco, this co-learning can take place (also) through organising direct exchanges, in the form of interactive seminars and workshops, with local experts and actors in order to capitalize on what has already been done and develop new partnerships at once. For instance, the Institutional University Cooperation partnership between KU Leuven and Moulay Ismaïl University since 2017 provides research-driven data and evidence on needs on water security and climate change in Morocco; the interaction with civil servants from the Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development – as initiated in the context of workshops in the framework of ADAPTtoDEVELOP – can ensure the relevance of the development-climate change nexus considerations to the country's agenda; the inclusion of the civil society can provide insights on the vulnerabilities and needs of communities at the local level, and all the above together will create opportunities for co-learning, a pool of resources and potential partners for the Belgian Development Cooperation to address the development-climate change nexus in the country. Through this co-learning Belgian development actors can accompany Morocco in the design and implementation of new agendas at the national, regional and local levels.

3. The development-climate change nexus demands systemic and integrative approaches in programme and project design and implementation (see also ADAPTtoDEVELOP Deliverables 1-3). The 'Programme de Coopération belgo-marocaine 2010-2013' targeted the crucial for Morocco in terms of agriculture and water. The 'Programme de Coopération belgo-marocaine 2016-2020' implements Belgium's strategy for middle income

countries according to which the focus is on capacity building and the transfer of skills and technologies. The considerations are broader here including four major programmes: i) a programme for the promotion and protection of women's and children's rights, ii) a programme to support the management of migration issues, iii) a programme to support the development of women's and young people's entrepreneurship, and iv) a programme to strengthen the skills of civil service managers at central and local level[18]. Based on the identified focal areas for Morocco in the section above, it becomes evident that the Belgian Development Cooperation engages with issues highly relevant to the development-climate change nexus in Morocco. Nevertheless, there is unfulfilled potential for integration of those sectoral investment programmes and projects, and of the environmental-climate change component throughout. For instance, development actors are working in Morocco on issues of youth, education and women entrepreneurship, yet these initiatives miss to connect explicitly and proactively to environmental and climate change concerns. Moreover, the strong expertise in sustainable water management and agriculture by means of (mainly) technical and technological innovations, as illustrated in the different programmes and projects both of university cooperation[19] and Enabel, should be accompanied with a focus on CCAS as a governance mission and social vulnerabilities (see also the Principle for Sustainable Adaptations n. 6).

4. The Belgian Development Cooperation could go beyond the 'Climate Screening' by accompanying development projects with climate risk and vulnerability assessments so that the development efforts are always positioned and assessed also against their contribution in addressing climate risk and vulnerabilities through CCA (see also the Principle for Sustainable Adaptations n. 1). To do this, it is possible to build on standardized approaches to those assessments. ADAPTtoDEVELOP has brought forward the need to integrate local knowledge and culture in such assessments through inclusive participatory processes that bring together traditional knowledge and values with expert and scientific information. In this case, more than quantification of indicators, which is the usual approach, the aim could be to build narratives supported by different types of data, ensure the development of adaptation actions that are meaningful to the communities, and contribute to the empowerment of the communities and actors on the ground rather than just to 'assisting' or imposing CCA agendas. This participatory approach to climate risk and vulnerability assessment seems to be necessary in countries like Morocco where incomplete decentralization, insufficient representation in decision-making, lack of data at the local level, and territorial heterogeneity are challenging 'successful' CCA and sustainable territorial development. At the same time, the ADAPTtoDEVELOP participatory workshops in Morocco revealed the good reception, cost-efficiency and constructive potential of such activities in the specific context. This participatory approach to the nexus is something that is missing from the development cooperation landscape in Morocco and, as such, could constitute the niche for innovation of the Belgian Development Cooperation vis-à-vis other actors.

5. Pointers for action in Morocco and beyond that have been transversal conclusions in the ADAPTtoDEVELOP participatory workshops refer to the need and potential of establishing novel partnerships and collaborations to address the development-climate change nexus. The participants of the ADAPTtoDEVELOP workshops explicitly mentioned their appreciation for bringing the development-climate change nexus issue in Morocco to the foreground through a participatory process and at a 'neutral' platform, highlighting both the relevance of the challenge for Morocco and the need to further engage with it collaboratively and by establishing partnerships. Indeed, the workshops brought up the idea to the participants and the engagement from our side to develop a network for reflection, exchange and taking action on the topic – the ADAPTtoDEVELOP Network. In this sense, the Belgian Development Cooperation can capitalise on this preliminary network of engaged actors in Morocco composed by Moroccan institutions, civil society, academics, donors and development cooperation actors of diverse experiences and expertise in order to develop synergies on working on the development-climate change nexus.

6. In partnership with other relevant actors and institutions, the Belgian Development Cooperation could engage in the design and implement ambitious, complex pilot projects on the development-climate change nexus through, for example, a dedicated climate fund per programme period to further enhance organisational learning in the mid- and long-term while achieving an in-depth engagement with the nexus in hotspot territories. This dedicated fund is intended for designing and implementing action research and knowledge co-production on the development-

climate change nexus aiming both at co-designing CCA solutions and obtaining experience in approached and methods integrating of sectoral investment programmes and projects. Box 01 presents the description of such a pilot project as identified by ADAPTtoDEVELOP.

Box 01. Example of pilot project for the dedicated climate fund: Women and the argan oil boom; a gendered lens to the climate-development nexus in Morocco

The Argan oil production in Morocco is relying exclusively on Berber women's traditional knowledge. Women in Morocco, especially in rural areas, are disproportionately underserved in access to education, employment, health care, and political voice. At the same time, some parts of the argan forest are threatened by climate change and increased competition for natural resources, including modern agriculture and livestock production. Governmental and internationally supported programmes together with projects by development actors and NGOs have been unfolding for years now in the area. Aiming at supporting climate adaptation and mitigation together with sustainable territorial development, these actions also focus on income generation and women's empowerment, in view of increased international market opportunities for argan oil. This pilot project explores the argan forest as an evolving social-ecological territory against the backdrop of climate change and a booming argan oil market, and critically discusses the changing role of women in all this. The project investigates the autonomous adaptations of women to social-ecological change; the way women (and the broader communities) have been impacted by climate change and development programmes and projects in the Argan forest; and the way all these processes formulate the vulnerability or resilience of the indigenous communities to climate and social-ecological change to identify venues for development and climate change adaptation action for the Belgian Development Cooperation.

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