

Climate Resiliency: Adaptation, Planning, and Recovery

“Climate adaptation without equity provides interventions but not transformative solutions. Equity takes the long view.” (Shamar Bibbins, senior program officer, The Kresge Foundation)

Not only a conservation problem

Land is disappearing, due to climate change – it’s literally disappearing underwater. That’s a conservation problem. People who live on the land that is disappearing will have to move to new land. Typically, we see that as a conservation loss. We rarely have the chance to use conservation to help build a community. It hasn’t been done well by planners, and hardly at all by conservationists. It is a huge opportunity. And it will only work if the affected community is engaged as a full partner and sees it as an opportunity. But affected communities face stark barriers to their participation in the conversation, and barriers to their recovery from disaster. The playing field has never been even. It’s important for conservation organizations to understand the pressures on communities; to broaden their thinking about what “conservation” means; to bring their strengths in service to community; and to meet community-based organizations as full partners in co-designing solutions.

Key issues

1. **RESILIENCY** – Land trusts seek to conserve land that’s important for ecological resiliency. That’s critical. It’s also critical to understand conservation is but a part of resiliency. Although climate change is often seen as an environmental challenge, it is but the most recent challenge to many communities. In human terms, **“resiliency” has implications for everything** from economy, infrastructure, and public health and safety to affordable housing and cultural and historical assets. For communities that have been at the edges of sustainability all along, they must recover *better* than they were before to be truly resilient.
2. **POVERTY and ETHNICITY** – Places with “persistent poverty” have had a relatively high rate of poverty over a long period. Poverty limits options; it is a stark barrier to all aspects of resiliency. People experiencing poverty face immediate problems, like putting food on the table and keeping a roof overhead. These have more urgency than future-oriented problems like climate change. Systemic racism also limits people’s options, from housing to education to jobs. **At the intersection of race and poverty, every challenge is compounded.**

Notes

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3. **RELATIONSHIPS** – Relationships are built at the speed of trust – which is slow to build and quick to break. Even in the urgency of climate change, it’s important to slow down. Even more, it’s important to check assumptions: even in the face of persistent poverty, people bring ingenuity, intelligence, and skill to create thriving communities. Take every invitation to “come see what we have and what we do” in rural America. Visiting and building relationships takes time and proof of real commitment, but also results in better plans and outcomes than technical solutions alone. ***Joint solutions emerge best out of openness, trust, shared wisdom, and mutual understanding.***

4. **POWER & RESOURCES** – The playing field has always been uneven. White-led organizations historically have more access to resources, opportunity, and options when dealing with challenges than those led by people of color. Conservation groups bring skills – GIS mapping, for example – that communities may lack in some regions. Many bring considerable financial wherewithal and donor relationships. ***Land trusts shouldn’t be afraid to share resources: introduce communities to foundations, seek funding together with community organizations, and help communities of color buy and own land.***

5. **PARTICIPATION = OWNERSHIP.** Solutions have more sticking power when they “do with” rather than “do for” people. If members of a community are engaged as full partners in designing a response to the problem they face, they are more likely to own and implement the solution. ***Ask for guidance, co-develop solutions, and lean toward saying “yes.”***