

**ADAPTATION
FUTURES 2025**
ACCELERATING ADAPTATION ACTION



ADAPTATION FUND

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

Hosted by the Adaptation Fund as part of its expanding Innovation Facility, Innovation Spotlight aims to accelerate, nurture, and empower innovative ideology, concepts, and solutions for effective and sustained climate change adaptation.



INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

A premier showcase of adaptation innovation from diverse sources including communities, organisations, Indigenous leaders, youth, companies, initiatives, financiers, and more. Speakers are fast paced and conversational, activities are engaging and allow deep thought and free flowing discussion.

Contents

Highlights	3
Spotlight 1 Currents of change	4
Spotlight 2 Cityscapes	5
Spotlight 3 Culture for innovation	6
Spotlight 4 Regeneration for Resilience	7
Spotlight 5 The next wave	8
Case studies	9
Actionable takeaways	10
Speakers and facilitators	11
Organizations	13

“One of the reasons why people have been able to survive in some of the most isolated environments in the world was the way in which they were able to adapt using smart, strategic ways of adaptation to the environment.”

Steven Ratuva, Recording spotlight 1, 00:10:19



Innovation Spotlight 1 Currents of change

Play the full recording

"We are already innovating. Our traditional knowledge and traditional knowledge holders is where our innovation sits"

Lisa Tumahai, 00:14:50

"In innovation, as we all know, failing is not exactly a bad thing. It's part of the learning process, but how can we actually afford to fail in a climate finance landscape that is already very stretched?"

Christian Lohberger, 00:35:00



Innovation Spotlight 2 Cityscapes

"Households and companies are quite fast at acting. Government is a slow actor at the end of the day, whereas households and companies can be much more rapid in what they do."

Adrian Healy, 00:20:00

"Innovation has to go hand in hand with affordability, justice, and accessibility. So that means investing in transit for everyone ... It means retrofitting public housing, not just houses of the future that few of us can afford"

Kevin Horsburgh, 00:08:00



Innovation Spotlight 3 Culture for Innovation

"Having a model where the community takes initiatives and leads that process is new. And I think that's the innovative part"

Eli S. Romero, 00:05:19

"There is an acknowledgement within our communities that youth are leading the way and they're meant to be leading the way because that is part of their responsibility"

Janna Wale, 00:28:00



Innovation Spotlight 4 Regeneration for Resilience

"There won't be any socioecological justice if there's no cognitive justice."

Suli Vunibola, 00:10:50

"Urban agriculture offers a bridge between innovation, introspection, resilience, and care. ... Every roof, every balcony or a shared garden really tells us that the future of wellbeing doesn't have to be built outside. It can be built very much in your own backyard."

Maitreyi Koduganti Venkata, 00:47:50



Innovation Spotlight 5 The Next Wave

"Don't adapt people to your projects, but you need to adapt your projects to the people"

Mariski Nirwan, 00:09:50

"I think in many ways we already have the solutions and we know what has to happen, but it's often a matter of getting the right people in the room, sometimes making connections that haven't been made before"

Laura Whitford, 00:19:45





1

The first Innovation Spotlight established the conceptual and practical groundwork for the series, with a collaborative and hopeful tone. It emphasized that adaptation and innovation are collective journeys, and called for a movement that values relationships, shares and scales successful approaches, and empowers indigenous and local leadership.

Innovation was framed as more than technological advancement; it encompasses new ways of thinking, organizing, and collaborating.

- The spotlight highlighted the need to contextualize innovation, recognizing that what is considered “innovative” varies across cultures and disciplines.

Indigenous leaders from the Pacific and other regions shared how adaptation and innovation are deeply rooted in traditional practices, navigation, and ecological stewardship.

- The importance of decolonizing climate finance and adaptation mechanisms was stressed, advocating for systems that recognize and fund indigenous solutions.

The spotlight underscored the value of trust, mutual respect, and ongoing engagement beyond the duration of conferences or projects.

- Locally led adaptation was championed, with calls to empower communities to lead efforts and shape solutions.
- Intellectual property issues were discussed, including the need to protect traditional knowledge while enabling its use in adaptation.

Accessing finance for unproven or locally developed ideas remains a significant barrier, particularly for indigenous and grassroots innovators.

- The spotlight discussed the need for more inclusive, risk-tolerant funding that support experimentation and learning from failure.

Innovation is inherent in adaptation, especially in communities that have survived and thrived in challenging environments for generations.



Building strong relationships - between individuals, communities, and organizations - is essential for successful innovation for adaptation.





2

The second Innovation Spotlight highlighted the complexity and promise of urban adaptation. Urban environments were presented as both sites of acute vulnerability and hubs of transformative potential. It called for cities to lead by example, foster partnerships, and ensure that innovation benefits all residents, especially the most vulnerable.

The spotlight explored how cities can leverage their diversity and density to accelerate adaptation.

- Innovation should be accessible to all, including marginalized and economically disadvantaged communities.
- The importance of partnerships—across sectors, levels of government, and with civil society—was repeatedly emphasized.

Grassroots initiatives and informal networks often fill gaps left by public services, especially in rapidly urbanizing regions.

- Case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa, Hong Kong, and various cities illustrated how households and local actors adapt in the absence of reliable public infrastructure.

Many pilot projects struggle to scale due to lack of funding, data integration, and policy support.

- The spotlight discussed the “pilot paradox,” where successful small-scale projects struggle to scale due to funding and policy barriers
- The need for streamlined adaptation thinking, inclusive planning, and capacity-building was highlighted.

There are tools to tackle uncertainties and to forecast futures but big data is needed to inform decision making and make it actionable.

Urban areas concentrate people, resources, and ideas, making them fertile ground for innovation and transformative change.



Big data and digital tools tackle risk and forecast futures, enable active control and changes in systems. Useable, accessible data enables innovation. Inclusion and fit-for-purpose data are key.





3

The third Innovation Spotlight celebrated the creativity, resilience, and leadership of communities and youth. It delved into the cultural dimensions of innovation. It called for greater investment in participatory methods, long-term support for innovation, and recognition of the value of warm data in adaptation.

The concept of “warm data” was introduced, emphasizing the importance of relationships, stories, and lived experience alongside quantitative (“cold”) data.

- Speakers discussed how combining warm and cold data strengthens adaptation by validating lived experiences with scientific evidence.

Young people were recognized as current and future leaders, responsible for passing knowledge and driving innovation and change.

- Indigenous youth shared stories of adaptation, resilience, and the importance of cultural continuity.

Interactive activities, such as workshops and polling, foster diverse perspectives and collaborative problem-solving.

- The role of universities and research networks was noted in supporting social innovation.
- The importance of participatory methods, design sprints, and collaborative problem-solving was highlighted.

Case studies from Belize, South Africa, Canada, and New Zealand showcased locally led adaptation projects, such as community-based fire brigades, watershed management, and food security initiatives.

The spotlight emphasized the need for long-term support for innovation, beyond competitions and short-term pilots.



A focus on capacity-building and ongoing collaboration is vital for innovation to flourish.





4

The fourth Innovation Spotlight demonstrated the power of community-driven, nature-based solutions for food security and climate resilience. It highlighted indigenous approaches, community-driven pathways, and the importance of restoring natural systems. It called for greater investment in indigenous innovation, participatory planning, and ecosystem restoration.

Communities from across the Pacific Islands shared their experiences developing adaptation strategies for food security, including rainwater harvesting, composting, and aquaculture.

- Participatory planning processes engaged local governments, island councils, and knowledge brokers in visioning and implementing resilient food systems.

Visualizations helped communities understand the impacts of climate change, see innovation opportunities, and prioritize adaptation actions.

- Advanced GIS mapping, drone photogrammetry, and visual tools were used to support decision-making, land use planning, and ecological restoration.

The spotlight emphasized the importance of restoring wetlands, forests, rivers, and coastal ecosystems for climate resilience and food security.

- Examples included wetland restoration in New Zealand, reef conservation in the Solomon Islands, and traditional soft engineering for coastal protection.

Good governance, training hubs, and knowledge brokers were identified as key enablers of successful adaptation.

The role of finance in enabling innovation and ecosystem restoration was discussed, including the need for inclusive, locally led funding mechanisms.

The spotlight challenged Western models of innovation, advocating for approaches that prioritize collective nurturing, ecological justice, and cognitive diversity.



Indigenous speakers emphasized the need to integrate traditional knowledge with modern science, and to recognize the value of place-based adaptation.





5

The fifth Innovation Spotlight underscored the importance of communication, engagement, and participatory methods for innovation in adaptation. It showcased arts-based approaches, games, and storytelling as vehicles for engagement, learning, and change. It called for change to build resilient, hopeful communities.

The use of traditional methods and collaborative endeavours fostered deep understanding, collective action, and cultural connection that can generate innovation.

- Activities such as weaving, games, storytelling and collaborative art were highlighted as a means of sharing knowledge, building trust, and inspiring hope for change.

Innovative methods for breaking silos and building trust included images, texts, songs, conferences, interactive workshops, and serious games.

- The spotlight discussed the importance of accessible, context-sensitive communication that resonates with diverse audiences.

Training, mentoring, and peer-to-peer learning were emphasized as key strategies for building capacity and resilience.

- The session celebrated messages of hope, leadership, and intergenerational collaboration, with elders and youth sharing their experiences and aspirations of innovation for adaptation.

The current investment and finance models for adaptation should innovate and adapt.

- Greater space is required for innovation in adaptation through knowledge brokering, varied communication methods, and collective action

Calls to action encouraged everyone to contribute to adaptation efforts, emphasizing collective responsibility and the power of community.



Innovation should be in alignment with nature. Nature has a right to exist and be nurtured.

Empowering local leaders and knowledge brokers to carry forward adaptation messages and maintain momentum was identified as critical for sustained impact.





CASE STUDIES

Tagaloa Cooper: Pacific Traditional Indicators Book

- Background: Climate variability threatens traditional livelihoods in Pacific islands.
- Approach: Communities documented indigenous indicators for seasonal changes and cyclones, integrating them with scientific forecasting.
- Outcomes: Improved disaster preparedness and food security; strengthened cultural identity.
- Lessons Learned: Combining indigenous and scientific knowledge enhances resilience.
- Scalability: Model now being replicated in other Pacific nations.

Vuyisile Precious Moyo: Cape Town Youth Heat Project

- Background: Urban heat threatened health and education.
- Approach: Youth painted roofs white to reduce indoor temperatures.
- Outcomes: Lowered temperatures, improved health and learning conditions.
- Lessons Learned: Simple, low-cost interventions can have significant impacts.
- Scalability: Replicable in other heat-stressed urban areas.

Kevin Horsburgh: Bogota's TransMilenio

- Background: Bogotá faced traffic congestion and air pollution.
- Approach: Implemented a rapid bus transit system to reduce reliance on private cars.
- Outcomes: Reduced traffic deaths and air pollution; improved mobility for low-income residents.
- Lessons Learned: Public transport innovation can deliver large-scale benefits when supported by policy.
- Scalability: Model replicated in other Latin American cities.

'Ofa Ma'asi-Kaisamy: Sabu Island Behavior Change

- Background: Communities relied heavily on agri-chemicals.
- Approach: Engaged communities through cultural storytelling to shift to nature-based practices.
- Outcomes: Reduced chemical use and improved soil health.
- Lessons Learned: Behavior change requires cultural resonance.
- Scalability: Approach adaptable to other agricultural communities.

Cathy Oke: Climate Innovation Readiness Navigator

- Background: Cities lacked tools to assess their capacity for climate innovation.
- Approach: Developed a self-assessment tool to identify gaps and strengths.
- Outcomes: Enabled cities to prioritize investments and partnerships for adaptation.
- Lessons Learned: Diagnostic tools empower local governments to take ownership of innovation.
- Scalability: Tool available globally for urban planners.

Highlight: The Climate Innovation Readiness Navigator tool was launched during the spotlight.

Paul Zaanen: Westport Intergenerational Adaptation Planning

- Background: Westport, NZ, faced severe flooding and economic challenges.
- Approach: Youth and older generations collaborated through participatory design workshops.
- Outcomes: Youth gained a platform and shifted community perspectives toward long-term resilience.
- Lessons Learned: Inclusive planning builds trust and supports sustainable adaptation.
- Scalability: The model can be applied in other communities needing youth engagement and future-focused planning.

Huhana Smith: Climate Resilient Farming in New Zealand

- Background: Maori communities faced climate change impacts, degraded wetlands, and unsustainable agricultural practices.
- Approach: Used advanced GIS mapping, drone photogrammetry, and carbon accounting to redesign farm landscapes, restore wetlands, and reforest marginal areas.
- Outcomes: Reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved ecological diversity, and enhanced climate resilience; visuals helped communicate and drive change among decision-makers.
- Lessons Learned: Integrating indigenous knowledge, technology, and visual communication enables practical, community-driven adaptation.
- Scalability: Approach is replicable for other indigenous and rural communities seeking climate-resilient land management.



ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAYS

“What can I do? What can you do? And then what can we do together?”

Dr. Gwen Point, Recording spotlight 5, 01:19:20

Combining traditional knowledge with new technologies leads to innovative and sustainable solutions.

- Successful adaptation integrates cultural, ecological, and technological knowledge.

Adaptation funding mechanisms should evolve and innovate.

- Develop adaptation funding mechanisms to understand and recognise adaptation, its needs and outcomes, to allow better flow of funds.

Technology should be paired with inclusive policies and community engagement.

- Building trust and relationships is as important as technical solutions for innovation to flourish.

Finance and policy should support locally led, nature-based solutions.

- There is a need for more accessible funding and supportive policy environments.

Restore natural systems so that we co-exist with nature and adapt together.

- Use pact and treaty-making to transform relationships with people and nature.

Communication and engagement are critical for enabling innovation, sustaining adaptation and driving action.

- Arts and storytelling connect people to solutions, foster empathy, and inspire action.
- Visual communication and participatory mapping enhance engagement.
- Participatory approaches build ownership, long-term impact, and intergenerational excellence.
- Co-design initiatives with groups representing the heterogeneity of populations bring communities together and boost support.
- Investment should be made in keeping partnerships alive.

SPEAKERS



Speakers, left to right, in order of appearance:

Mikko Ollikainen, Bronwyn Hayward, Steven Ratuva, Lisa Tumahai, Tagaloa Cooper, Fei Jiao, Rui Lopes, Christian Lohberger, Nadège Trocellier, Allan Taman, Anna Deinhard, Khalid Hossain, Carlos Quispe Dávila, Kevin Horsburgh, Arjan De Haan, Adrian Healy, Pedro Henrique Campello Torres, Laurence Delina, Franziska Stefanie Hanf, Patrick Curran, Jon Hathaway, Akanksha Sharma, Mahendra Gooroochurn, Eli S. Romero, Vladislav Arnaoudov, Sarah Connors, Gina Ziervogel, Katisha Paul, Janna Wale, Vuyisile Precious Moyo, Geoff Wood, Marlow Winder, Carter Oosterdijk, Suli Vunibola, Huhana Smith, Shalander Kumar, Garth Simon, Abena Ofosu, Janet Stephenson, Maitreyi Koduganti Venkata, Peter Zetterli, Pia Treichel, Monica Borrero, Houssam Chahin, Youssef Nassef, Jesper Hornberg, 'Ofa Ma'asi-Kaisamy, Nooshin Torabi, Andrea Grant, Susannah Fisher, Gwen Point, Saliha Dobardzic, Marcus Johannesson.

FACILITATORS



Facilitators, left to right, in order of appearance:

Eleanor Saunders, Peter Edwards, Sandra Lee Morrison, Bruce Christopher Glavovic, Cathy Oke, Benjamin Jance IV, Sareh Moosavi, Milena Niehaus, Mariski Nirwan, I Gusti Ngurah Paulus Widya, Toroa Charteris, Zabeel Scanlon, Helen Kerr, Paul Zaanen, Vilimaina Naqelevuki, Vanessa Heleta, Kieu Gavin, Laura Whitford, Rachel Hall, Lulu Zhou, Olya Albot, Teera Eriuta, Salome Topo, Slade Ririmae, Julian Otajama, Desmond Warugutaia, Molly Hunter, Tearine Barnabas, James Butler.



Innovation Spotlight 2025 brought together a wide network of stakeholders, partners and groups, with a focus on Indigenous, community and locally led innovation and innovative solutions.

Thank you to all who participated.

Innovation Spotlight team

Saliha Dobardzic

Marcus Johannesson

Eleanor Saunders

Andrew Hollander



Organizations represented at Innovation Spotlight 2025

Adaptation Fund, ActionAid Australia, African Climate and Development Initiative, University of Cape Town, BCAFN, Buller District Council, Canada's International Development Research Centre, Cardiff University, Cawthron Institute, CGAP, DAR NGO (Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales), Deltares, Department of Environment, Antigua and Barbuda, European Space Agency, Monash University, Australia, Faculty of Māori & Indigenous Studies, University of Waikato, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, Global Resilience Partnership, Green Climate Fund, GSMA, International Crops, Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, International Institute for Environment and Development, International Trade Centre, International Water Management Institute, Ijo Maringi Association, Solomon Islands, Isthmus Group, Lincoln University, Live and Learn Environmental Education (Australia & Kiribati), Manaaki Whenua Group, Bioeconomy Science Institute, Massey University, Pacific Climate Change Centre, Pacific Community, Pokeka Poutini Ngai Tahu Ltd, Protected Areas Conservation Trust - Belize, RMIT University, Rosmini College / TOTCUS, Santo Sunset Environment Network, Scion Group, Bioeconomy Science Institute, Shifting the Power Coalition, SPREP, Talitha Project Tonga, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, The Nature Conservancy, Toirauwharangi/College of Creative Arts, Massey University, UN CTCN, UNDP - Adaptation Fund Climate Innovation Accelerator, UNESCO, UNESP (São Paulo State University), UNHCR, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, University College London, University of Canterbury / Te Wānanga o Waitaha, University of Hamburg, University of Illinois - Urbana Champaign (US)/Indian Institute for Human Settlements (India), University of Mauritius, University of Melbourne, University of Tennessee, World Intellectual Property Organization, WWF-Solomon Islands, Yayasan Konservasi Alam Nusantara.