



The Deep Listening Project: Communication Infrastructure for Collaborative Adaptation

Over the next decade, an estimated 100 million people will need to adapt where and how they live to accommodate the changing climate. Although mitigation strategies can slow the pace of climate change, change is inevitable. Government and intergovernmental institutions will need to lead the way in facilitating adaptation processes. However, for these to be successful, equitable, and not lead to maladaptive outcomes, institutions need to collaborate with frontline and Indigenous communities—the first and often most impacted by climate change.

Currently, the communication infrastructure for collaborative adaptation planning does not exist. Frontline communities lack the mechanisms and institutional support to communicate well with institutions. Likewise, institutions lack the capacity to understand communities' values or to integrate their lived experiences and visions into concrete decision-making scenarios.

The Deep Listening Project (TDLP) seeks to create a sustainable communication infrastructure for collaborative adaptation. TDLP will co-design tools and procedures that emphasize the human and holistic environmental dimensions of adaptation while appropriately using artificial intelligence and decision-support technologies to enable institutions to “deeply listen” to Indigenous and frontline communities in order to create effective and responsive plans for climate adaptation.

We will explore and seek to enhance five components of deep listening:

1. **Knowledge sharing:** Creating the baseline rules and technical infrastructure for data and information sharing between institutions and frontline communities.
2. **Holding space:** Designing digital and physical spaces for open and safe dialog among stakeholders.
3. **Co-production and sharing of climate imaginaries:** Creating tools and platforms for local storytelling that are informed by climate science and legible to decision-makers.
4. **Sensemaking with a diversity of perspectives and scientific data:** Developing easy-to-use, AI-informed tools for institutions to make sense of a variety of inputs from frontline communities.
5. **Evaluation and monitoring support to ensure accountability and to assess quality of information:** Creating tracking technologies and protocols that hold institutions and communities accountable to adaptation plans.

STRATEGY

The project will be carried out with a case study methodology, where we will engage in collaborative **research, design, and practice within eight discrete contexts**. In years one and two, we will partner with Indigenous groups in the United States and frontline communities in Nepal. Additional case studies will be developed in Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire, Brazil, Colombia, or Argentina in years three and four. Within each case study, we will explore the five components of deep listening and develop and test technologies that can enhance communication and decision-making, leading to greater trust and sustainable planning.

The Deep Listening Project will provide a rigorous examination and evaluation of how institutions currently collaborate with frontline communities in developing adaptation plans and create new technologies and procedures that can be adopted and adapted in contexts around the world. Considerable effort will be spent on cultivating and socializing emerging communication practices within a range of organizational cultures to ensure broad uptake of new tools.

KEY PERSONNEL

Affiliates across the Institute include the MIT Civic Design Initiative, MIT Center for Constructive Communication, Media Lab, and MIT Open Documentary Lab. External partners include University of Southern California Civic Paths, Carnegie Mellon University's Transition Design Institute, University of Maine's Wabanaki Center for Adaptive Capacity and Climate Change, Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), World Bank, UNDP, Red Cross, and ICRC.