

Info Note

Barriers to effective climate change policy development and implementation in West Africa

Findings from a qualitative study in Mali, Ghana and Senegal

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Key messages

- *National Climate Change Policies and Action Plans have been formulated for Mali, Ghana and Senegal. Despite progress, there's still a lack of awareness and understanding of the various climate policy implementation processes at regional and local levels among district-level staff members and the general public.*
- *Lack of operational capacity at lower administrative levels, little involvement from stakeholders, lack of awareness and funding are all identified barriers to policy development and effective implementation in the three countries.*
- *Lack of information flows between national and local levels around existing climate policy processes is a major obstacle for effective implementation.*
- *Supervised knowledge-sharing platforms for national, regional and local policy makers and other stakeholders have the potential to strengthen information flows and support policy development and implementation.*

This Info Note explores major barriers for effective climate change policy implementation in Ghana, Mali and Senegal with a particular focus on agriculture and food systems. It aims to provide insights to researchers, policy makers and development practitioners working on climate change issues and activities as to what hampers successful climate policy implementation in West Africa and how identified barriers could be overcome.

The Info Note builds on an extensive qualitative study, including desktop research on established climate, agriculture and food security policies, complemented with 12 focal group discussions, four in each country, and interviews in the three countries with key

community- and national-level stakeholders. Stakeholders include policy makers, scientists, farmers'- and non-governmental organization representatives and traditional leaders. The study looked at motivation and capacity to implement climate policies and initiatives. The interviews and discussions were conducted as part of the "Bridging the science-policy gap through climate exchange platforms in West Africa" project, led by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). The project is part of the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) Flagship on Policies and Institution for Climate-Resilient Food Systems and CCAFS West Africa program. The Flagship works from district to global levels to, among many things, try to better understand the power dynamics and processes around climate- and food system policy development and implementation.

Climate change and West Africa

Climate change is one of the most critical challenges for agriculture and food security across the globe but particularly so for countries still developing and building climate adaptive capacity, as in the case in much of Africa. Most African economies still rely heavily on agriculture, and about 95% of the agriculture sector is dependent on regular rainfall (Wani et al. 2009). The West Africa region is highly vulnerable to climate change and increased variability. Research shows that climate change will have grave impacts on especially sorghum, maize, common beans and finger millet, all key staple foods and sources of nutrition, and all will be unsuitable for farming in most of the countries along the Sahel in the future. Changes and shifts to more drought-tolerant and heat-resistant livestock and crop varieties will be needed. Such a shift requires long-term investments along with policy and institutional changes (Ramirez-Villegas and Thornton, 2015:18).

Farmers are already trying to change agriculture practices to adapt to climate change on their own. However fragmented, small and local efforts are not sufficient to adequately deal with the large-scale challenges that climate change, and also environmental degradation, present.

Donors, international and multilateral organizations have for the past few years provided financial and developmental support to West African governments to finalize national climate change mitigation and adaptation plans and policies, and to mainstream climate change into for example agriculture and food-related strategies. As a result, all of the three countries have made progress on national climate policies and in some cases even produced Climate Action Plans.

Senegal developed its National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) back in 2006. The National Committee on Climate Change (COMNACC) is leading the NAPA implementation. The Government of Ghana developed, together with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), its National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) in 2012, but formally launched it in 2014. In 2011, Mali developed three key documents: the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP), the National Climate Change Strategy to operationalize the NCCP, and a National Climate Action Plan to translate the objectives of the strategies into concrete activities. The climate change policy was finally approved by the government in 2014, but has not yet been endorsed by the parliament (June 2015).

Conversions of these policies into concrete actions and subsequent implementations are currently lagging behind. This is partly due to overall lags in policy planning, development and approval processes, but there are also a number of other barriers, as outlined below. A better understanding of what is hampering policy progress could improve the implementation.

Lack of policy awareness

Effective policy implementation depends to a large degree on how involved and knowledgeable key actors are about the policy documents, both what they contain and how to translate them into actual activities (Klijn, 1996).

The focal group discussions and interviews revealed a disconnect between climate policy development at the national level and the information available at the district level. The interviewed stakeholders seemed to be aware that policies had been developed, but staff supposed to implement the policies, or stakeholders that otherwise need the information in climate development work, had not been involved in the policy development process nor had anyone shared the documents with them:

"I watched on the TV that the national climate change policy document was launched, but so far, as a member of an NGO working on climate change issues, I was not associated to be part of the policy process." (Interview with NGO Officer in Mali, October 2014)

"We heard on the radio and saw the news on television that His Excellency the President had launched a policy on climate change. We are yet to see the policy document. I believe that in the course of time, copies will be sent to the districts. However, we are the ones to implement the policy and we must be involved in the process and be aware of its contents" (Interview with District Coordinating Director in Ghana, October 2014)

Local and district-level staff members need sufficient knowledge about climate policies in order to devise implementation strategies. Physical dissemination and communication around the policies at all levels are critical activities to build awareness and policy literacy. Ideally however, key stakeholders and operationalizing staff should be involved in the development process.

Policy awareness and implementation is further hampered by widespread illiteracy in the region, and few efforts to translate policies and communicate them in local languages have been made. To implement a policy, genuine understanding of the policies is needed. Here, district-level staff members could help translate and share the information with local communities to support implementation.

Extending policy involvement

Relevant stakeholders, such as development and non-governmental organizations, traditional and local leaders, farmers' associations or private companies, have not been tremendously involved in the climate policy processes in the three countries.

National policy actors are here ignoring key opportunities to receive valuable, context-specific insights, build relationships that could support implementation and potentially provide funding, and support existing climate-related initiatives that have the potential to reach especially vulnerable communities and farmers in remote areas.

"It is a pity that those who have the hand in the [resources] are not associated with the policy process. [Policies are] developed by the national level staff /.../ Every region has its specificities; it is thus necessary to consider all this when developing climate change plans. It is easy to sit down in the office and to set a policy, but the application remains a problem" (Interview with a Farmer Association's Leader in Mali, October 2014)

The merits of using participatory processes of engagement to bring stakeholders together are shown to encourage sharing of different perspectives and support greater collaboration in promoting utility and effective use of climate information (Lindsey et al, 2015: 24).

Another key issue is the recurrent disconnect between produced climate information by scientists and what policy makers actually need to make informed decisions and policies. Better communication between scientists and policy makers and a willingness to accommodate information needs on both sides is needed (Lindsey et al, 2015:16).

The **Science-Policy Bridging Project** led by International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) as part of CCAFS Flagship on Policies and Institutions has set up nine district-level stakeholder platforms in Ghana, Senegal and Mali. The platforms promote science-based support and facilitate interactions between stakeholders to develop more climate-resilient food systems in the districts.

Set up in 2014, the platform participants include policy makers and advisors, scientists, private sector representatives and farmers' associations as well as traditional and religious authorities. The activities build upon previous work done by CCAFS West Africa program, which has set up national-level knowledge exchange platforms in the region back in 2012.

The new district-level alliances will help complement the national ones through providing information and insights from lower levels, such as districts and communities, while providing a space for better and guided interaction between key players from district- to national levels.

"Through the platform, I will be able to meet technicians and researchers and discuss very directly what concerns we have and how we can work together to find solutions to our many climate change-related problems." President of the Regional Union of Milk Producers' Cooperative Societies, member of the Bougouni district Platform, Mali.

Lack of operational capacity and funding

The decentralization of political, administrative, and financial responsibilities from the central government to district-level institutions is in process in many West African countries. Substantial capacity building and support from qualified staff at various levels are required to enact a successful decentralization process. However, such resources and capacity often do not exist at the district levels. For instance, although the district of Upper West Ghana generally has officers in charge of the regional divisions, some offices and spaces are vacant.

The focal group discussions reveal that finding suitable and qualified officers willing to serve in regional positions is a struggle. And in the districts, the staff

situation is even worse. Several positions are not filled, as officers that for example oversee policy implementations do not want to serve in decentralized bodies outside of the main cities. The decentralization process requires governments to be responsible for creating conducive conditions at lower levels that can help identify local policy constraints, finding ways to respond to climate impacts, and implement local-level policies. However, with staff missing and governments offering little support to build the much needed capacity to manage such complex processes, the decentralization is proving to be a challenge, not only for climate-related policy implementation work.

In areas where local structures do exist, e.g. functioning district assemblies and associated climate change initiatives, the implementation of the climate programs is often constrained by lack of financial resources. Funding is crucial for implementing policies. Albeit important, this aspect is often overlooked in national adaptation plans. The decentralized structures are often underfunded and not able to implement envisioned programs. The bulk of donor resources are often mobilized at national levels, which often do not 'trickle-down' to the district level.

"Accessing donor resources for the district is extremely difficult. It is not so much the geographical distance, but the difficulty in identifying willing donors and convincing them that even though they have provided resources at the national level, they still need to come into the districts to support particular development actions such as for climate change." (Interview with a District Coordinating Director of Lawra in Ghana, October 2014)

"Our regional body has developed a proposal for tree planting as a way to reduce the tree cutting, but we could not get the support of the government. It is the responsibility of the government to provide financial support for helping us to develop and implement our climate change initiatives." (Interview with a decentralized officer in Senegal, November 2014).

Conclusions

Focal group discussions and interviews with 68 individuals, and desktop research indicate that all three countries are currently dealing with similar issues related to developing and implementing suitable climate policies and strategies. The discussions also revealed that climate policy development and implementation is lagging behind in the countries due to a number of factors, such as slow political development and approval processes, lack of policy awareness and information sharing from national to district- and local levels, little capacity enhancement of policy implementation officers at all levels. In addition, funding flows are halting due to ineffective and incomplete decentralization processes, with lack of institutional capacity and human resources to effectively manage the district offices. When structures are in place, officers and development partners still lack sufficient funding to carry out climate-related projects.

Putting emphasis on increased knowledge sharing, getting more stakeholders involved, improving funding and information flows while building the capacity of additional stakeholders, including non-traditional ones, are key steps to improve climate policy development and implementation in West Africa.

Channeling policy documents into existing education curriculum could be a way forward to improve policy literacy and access to the information by the younger generation, some of whom will work with climate change issues in the future.

The district- and national-level knowledge sharing platforms set up across West Africa is a strategic approach to overcome some of the hindering factors to policy progress. Through establishing meeting spaces for key stakeholders involved in climate change, agriculture and food production, participants get to share and discuss climate-related challenges and opportunities. They also receive training and capacity building on how to use available climate tools, and data while feeding in useful local insights and guidance to national level climate- and food system policy processes.

Through putting climate scientists and development partners as well as the private sector in touch with policy makers, participants can be more in tune with current policy processes and the context in which policies are developed, and potentially fill in current knowledge gaps and provide support. On the other hand, policy makers and other stakeholders will receive latest climate change information and get support to incorporate latest relevant science into policies. Participants are also required to share the information to local communities, thus supporting farmers and others to, through the use of climate-smart agriculture practices, adapt to climate change.

Through strategic private sector engagement, via the steered knowledge sharing platforms or other arrangements, governments also open up for additional funding opportunities and insights in policy development and implementation.

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CCAFS and Info Notes

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