

Info Note

Barriers to successful climate change policy implementation in Uganda

Findings from a qualitative policy study in Nwoya and Rakai districts, Uganda.

By Wendy Okolo, Jennifer Twyman, Edidah Ampaire and Mariola Acosta

AUGUST 2015

Key Messages

- Structural barriers like insufficient funding, low staffing levels and lack of coordinated planning across ministries hinder implementation of climate change adaptation policies in Uganda.
- Nationally crafted policies need to better reflect social and financial contexts at local levels to ensure effective policy uptake and implementation.
- National-level climate change policies have to be better linked with local-level climate action plans.
- National-level commitment to climate change adaptation should be demonstrated through equitable funding allocation across district- and sub-county levels.

Introduction

Smallholder agriculture and food systems in Africa are highly vulnerable and susceptible to climate-related impacts and changes, further debilitating food security (World Bank, 2009; Ramirez-Villegas and Thornton, 2015). With agriculture making up a high proportion of African countries' gross domestic product, climate-resilient food systems policies are needed. Policies are important strategies to respond to climate change and to enhance climate adaptation and mitigation activities. Policy-makers are increasingly recognizing the need to craft and implement climate policies while ensuring climate change aspects are integrated into other public policies and strategies (Urwin and Jordan 2008). A multi-level analysis has examined how policy processes within agriculture, forestry, natural resource- and land management in Uganda support or undermine climate change adaptive responses and policy implementation. This Info Note summarizes these findings.¹

The study was conducted by the 'Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA)' project led by the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA). The project forms a part of the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) policies and institutions research in East Africa. The project's objective is to inform food system policies and institutions using climate science and tools in Uganda and Tanzania.

Uganda's policy environment

The research study undertook an analysis of the political context, the policy environment and the broad institutional and policy framework in Uganda. Ten focus groups discussions on policy implementation were held, with men and women farmers separately in the Rakai and Nwoya districts. In parallel, 25 semi-structured expert interviews with policy formulators at national level, international donors, non-governmental organization representatives, district and sub-county officials, Parish chiefs and local council leaders were also held.

The policies that were analyzed include the National Agriculture Policy 2011, Uganda Forestry Policy 2001 (incl. acts and regulations); Uganda National Climate Change Policy 2012, Uganda National Land Policy 2013, National Adaptation Program of Action, National Policy for the Conservation and Management of Wetland Resources, and the Rakai District Environment Management Bill.

Key findings

Policy consultation and participation: According to the reviewed government literature and the interviews held with national officials, the Ugandan policy formulation process is inclusive and consultative. When analyzing Uganda's decentralized governance structure, it should, at least in theory, leverage funds to respective district-level sectors for further decision-making and policy

¹ Full report: Ampaire EL, Happy P, Van Asten P, Radeny M. 2015. The role of policy in facilitating adoption of climate-smart agriculture in Uganda. <http://hdl.handle.net/10568/65143>

implementation. This structure, if implemented as envisioned in the National Decentralization Policy, provides opportunities for local level participation in decision-making on climate-related issues. It also gives local governments responsibility to address planning, developmental and environmental issues. This is important as local-level planning is key in generating uptake of climate change adaptation practices.

However, based on the interviews with district officials and discussions arranged with local-level focus groups, policy formulation consultation did not always take place, contrasting the information received by national officials.

Non-consultative policy processes are not recommended, as the produced policies do not always capture social and cultural complexities and the specific challenges faced in local communities. Lack of local context and understanding can present a challenge for effective policy implementation.

Overlapping mandates: At the national level, the reviewed policies demonstrate need for stronger cross-sectoral coordination and accountability, as there are overlapping mandates between sectors. For instance, the National Environment Policy seeks to promote land stewardship through strengthening land and resource tenure rights, while the Land Policy pursues the same objective. Such overlaps imply lack of synergy between sectors, which could lead to a situation whereby none of the sectors is accountable or conflicting goals.

Limited technical capacity: Findings show that there is lack of technical capacity among national level staff. The semi-structured interviews reveal need for more technical, climate-knowledgeable staff members to support in policy formulation. Similarly, technical expertise was lacking at the district-levels. District- and sub-county officials lack knowledge to translate climate change issues into locally appropriate and adaptive practices and actions.

Poor coordination: Some of the policies and plans from the various governmental sectors are not aligned or coordinated. For example, the National Agriculture Policy acknowledges the effects of climate change on agriculture and highlights the significance of joint planning between the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Water and Environment. However, there has not as of yet been a proposal on how specific activities can be coordinated to jointly address climate change effects on agriculture. The Ministry of Water and Environment is also limited in its ability to mainstream climate change across different sectors. Its mandate is limited to monitoring how climate change is mainstreamed across respective sectors and coordinate national climate-related initiatives; a mandate that it is ill equipped to handle due to little technical expertise and low staffing capacity. The Ministry's

limitations in conducting proper monitoring are due to the department neither having the mandate to influence budget allocation nor decision-making power over relevant sectors. This hampers efforts to mainstream climate change activities across sectors.

Skewed budget allocations: The study found that not much authority and financial decision-making has been cascaded to the districts and sub-county levels as per the decentralization vision and plan. District-level funds are not evenly allocated across sectors either. For example, education and roads received the highest allocation of funds while agriculture, natural resource- and land management received the least proportions. The disparity of budget allocations demonstrates to some degree a limited commitment to sectors highly vulnerable to climate change, and subsequent implementation of much needed adaptive activities. Commitment is shown through financial support and engagement in more vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and food production. As a result, a number of climate initiatives at the local- and community level remain unimplemented. For example, the Uganda National Climate Change Policy addresses interactions between population dynamics, climate change and development and makes recommendations to support initiatives towards primary education, reproduction- and maternal- and child health. However, at the district-level none of these initiatives are being implemented.

In addition, power struggles over budget allocations and resources seem to be limiting interaction between national- and district-level offices, which in turn restrain information-sharing and collaborations across the board.

Limited policy literacy at local levels: Focal Group Discussions at the local and community level reveal little awareness and knowledge of development- and climate policies and plans. In fact, during discussions policies were often mistaken for, for example, rights of women, children and land, and environmental practices, such as replanting trees after harvest. Notably, there is a language barrier since policies are most often documented in English and not translated into local dialects.

Little attention to local contexts: National policies often don't include community-level social-, cultural-, environmental- and economic challenges and contexts. For example, the land policy proposes formalization of land held in customary tenure, without taking into account the socio-cultural interpretation of land ownership, control, transfer or the historicity of land tenure.

An example of a national policy that doesn't take local contexts into consideration is the National Agricultural Policy, which aims to "transform subsistence farming to

sustainable commercial agriculture”. However, farming in the Nwoya district is mainly done at smallscale levels by women who lack labor and financial capacity to conduct commercial farming. District-level officials should be equipped with information about climate change issues, such as climate impacts and adaptive measures, and how these affect specific farming districts. Their local knowledge is key in ensuring policies are adapted to various local social and cultural contexts.

Local complexities and policy responses: the case of Nwoya District

A disconnect between nationally created policies, with specifically set goals and objectives, and local socio-cultural contexts is demonstrated in the recurring land tenure conflicts and related policy responses in Uganda. Through the Land Policy, a system where ownership will be formalized and registered has officially been introduced. The system will help address customary land tenure issues across the country. However, findings from Nwoya indicate that the formalization of ownership by itself is not a panacea to land tenure conflicts, nor is the policy implementation easy.

Regular reports of land conflicts and disputes between clans, communities and even within families indicate that there are still many incidences of land-related conflicts. Much of the disputes originate from the civil war, which lasted 25 years and led to many elders – the protectors of knowledge over landownership – losing their lives. When resettling, survivors could not remember land boundaries and settled down in land that wasn't necessarily theirs. Destroyed natural land beacons further complicated resettlements and exacerbated disputes.

During the male focus group discussions it was noted that land in the pre-civil war era used to belong to clans, and not individuals. Clan members would cultivate anywhere and did not have to own land. People had access rights rather than owning land. The concept of ownership was introduced in the Internally Displaced Persons camps (IDPs). After, the civil war, families were allocated land, and with time there was increased interest in land ownership. This was more prevalent among young people, who were interested in getting their own portion and selling it off. The group discussions revealed further that more people were now entering into other clan territories with vested interests of acquiring more land.

Given this complex historical background, it can be argued that a blanket approach, like the formalization of ownership to solve land conflicts in Uganda will not be sufficient. This because it disregards underlying historical processes of land ownership, access, transfer and control. Formalization of current structures also has the potential of reproducing inequality or aggravating conflicts.

An interview with the District Head of National Resource Management revealed how implementing the Land Policy proved to be a challenge, as people were still in a post-war state, still moving back and resettling.

The District Head had observed that when returning from camps, people's focus was not on natural resource conservation but more on their immediate needs. Securing immediate food needs and income, was one of the reasons why implementation of watershed conservation activities in the district had failed.

For effective policy implementation, local- and district-level officers have to assess the often complex, socio-cultural contexts in respective localities, and analyze how these could impact policy implementation and be better reflected in development plans and policies.

Conclusions

- Structural issues such as lack of technical expertise, equal funding and coordinated planning, little communication between district- and local communities all impede efficient climate policy implementation.
- Non-consultative policy processes and subsequent policies from the national-level many times fail to consider districts' and local-communities' distinct socio-economic- and environmental contexts, which in turn affect policy implementation.
- There is need for more interaction between local actors and national policy formulators to enhance effective policy development and implementation.
- Policies and implementation activities could be better linked across sectors and levels. Stronger links and coordination between the Ministry of Agriculture and other ministries and national institutions are encouraged to limit damaging climate impacts on agriculture.

Recommendations

- Provide equal financial resources and authority to districts to develop locally appropriate climate change adaptation plans. This will further enhance adaptation and support the overall decentralization strategy.
- The climate change policy development and implementation process will benefit from stronger inter-sectorial linkages and greater cross-coordination.
- Structures to support implementation of climate adaptation policies and activities by for example sub-level committees should be developed. This is key, as some existing sub-county environmental committees are not functioning as envisioned but could provide the support that local- and district-levels require.

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About this Info Note

This Info Note is a product of the Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA) project, supported by CCAFS Flagship on Policies and Institutions for Climate-Resilient Food Systems and East Africa program. The views expressed in this Info Note are those of the authors and not necessarily endorsed by or representative of the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS), the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and partners.

Authors:

Wendy Okolo (w.okolo@cgiar.org) is a Gender Researcher at CIAT-Kenya

Jennifer Twyman (j.twyman@cgiar.org) is a post-doctoral social and gender scientist at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Cali, Colombia and the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security (CCAFS).

Edidah Ampaire (e.ampaire@cgiar.org) is a scientist and Project Coordinator for the Policy Action for Climate Change Adaptation (PACCA) project.

Mariola Acosta (acfra.mariola@gmail.com) is a Research Fellow at IITA-Uganda and PhD candidate at Wageningen University

Correct citation: Okolo W, Twyman J, Ampaire E, Acosta, M. 2015. Barriers to successful climate change policy implementation in Uganda: Findings from a qualitative policy study in Nwoya and Rakai Districts, Uganda. CCAFS Info Note. Copenhagen, Denmark: CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS).



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