

Report Part Title: CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AND PRACTICE

Report Title: LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT WITH CLIMATE CHANGE
ADAPTATION IN UGANDA

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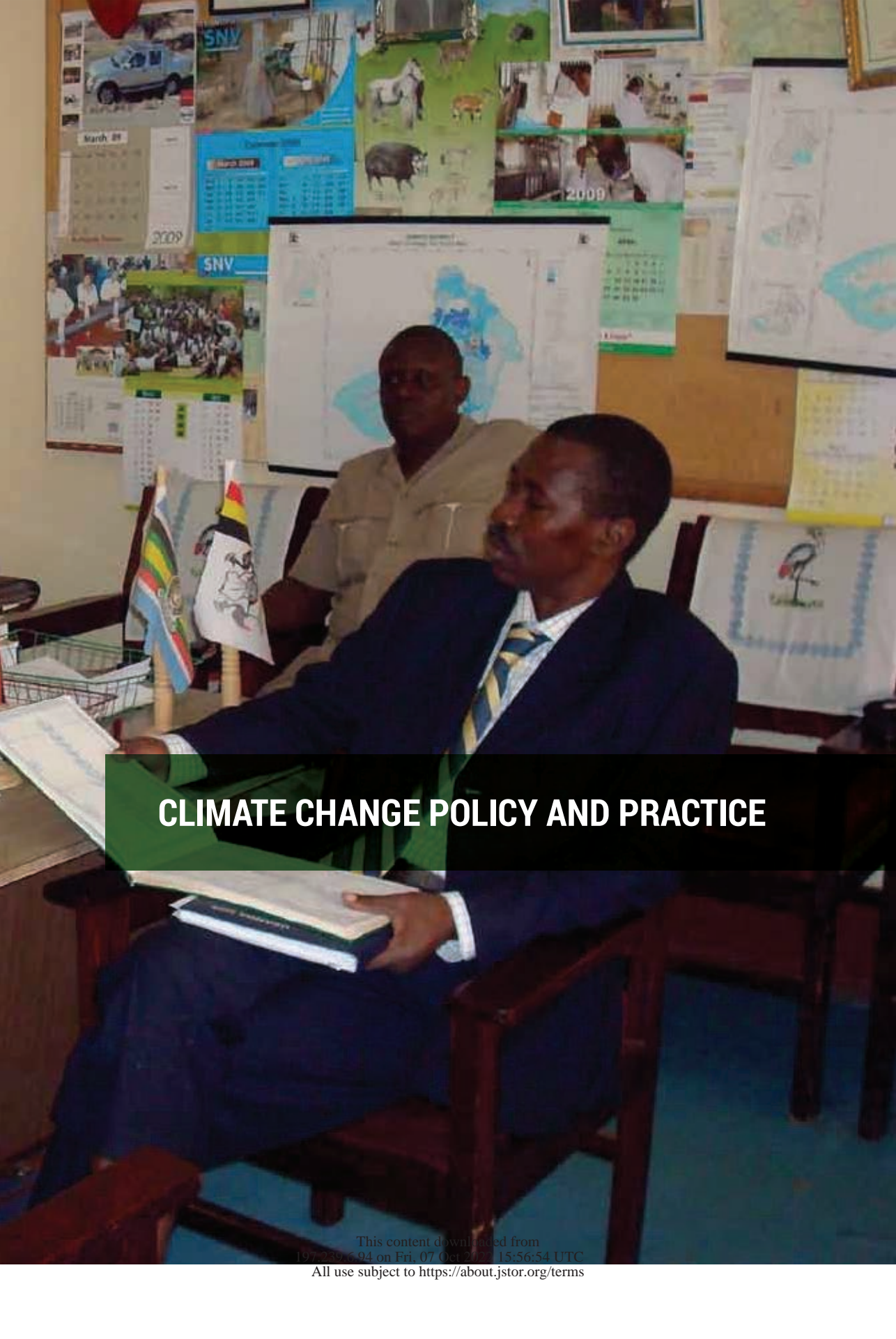
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CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY AND PRACTICE

This section first analyses the national policy response and characterizes the new climate change policy arena as compared with the more established disaster and emergency response policies. Thereafter the institutional landscape involved with climate change is mapped. This is followed by an assessment of the relationship between national policy and local government practice by introducing the principle of subsidiarity. Finally, we discuss how climate change is articulated or ignored among local government politicians, exemplified by a case study from Amuria District, where climate change was successfully used as a platform for local government elections in 2006.

EVOLUTION OF A NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

In 2007 a National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) was issued by the Department of Meteorology in the Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment (MoWE). The formulation of NAPA was carried out by central ministries, with the aim of making Uganda eligible to receive funding from the Least Developed Country Fund (LDCF). Policy formulation involved little consultation with stakeholders outside the central ministries. The National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) developed nine proposed project areas to address climate-related hazards and disasters that were all formulated by central ministries. As a consequence, central ministerially managed projects became the chosen implementation modality of NAPA, thereby ignoring the Decentralization Act and the existence of local government structures (MWE 2006).

The National Climate Change Policy was formulated during 2012. The process of formulating a new National Climate Change Policy has been driven by a newly established Climate Change Unit (CCU) located within MWE and financially supported by international development agencies, including the EU, DFID, DANIDA, the World Bank and the World Food Program (WFP).

The National Climate Change Policy has coordination mechanisms at the national and local government levels. Nationally each of the numerous ministries, departments and agencies with a role to play in the implementation of the policy responses outlined in this document will designate a departmental focal point and will be accountable for the implementation of the prescribed policy responses that concern them. An Implementation Strategy details the accountabilities of the various ministries, departments and agencies.

At the local government level, the focal point is anchored within the Natural Resources Department that is tasked with ensuring that climate change issues within all departments are integrated into District Development Plans. The existing District Environment Committee is expected to act as a mechanism to ensure cross-sectoral coordination. The decision to empower the District Environmental Committee to coordinate and mainstream climate change activities for all other local government departments reflects the fact that MWE formulated the policy. The reality at district level, however, is that the environmental department is relatively weak and has little power to coordinate or mainstream activities.

SUBSIDIARITY ASSESSMENT OF THE GOVERNANCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Within the context of nation states, the principle of subsidiarity tells us that the functions of government should be allocated to the levels that are most competent to handle them.

In the case of climate change adaptation, the appropriate level of governance is necessarily local, as the vulnerabilities caused by climate change hazards are highly context-specific, and the process of adapting is highly discretionary in nature and likely to vary over time. On the other hand, the level of governance cannot be too local. Experience of autonomous adaptation clearly shows that, while farmers have a long tradition of adapting natural resource management practices to changing weather conditions, they are unable to cope with the magnitude of changes associated with climate change without collective action and outside assistance.

Uganda undertook a comprehensive decentralization reform in 1993 and has since built up government units at the district and sub-county levels, with elected councillors and technical and administrative staff providing a range of services. Since 2000 a second wave of reforms aimed at deepening democracy has been implemented, leading to the establishment of new local institutions that link users of the primary service units to local government institute Agrawal 2010. Local government bodies in Uganda are well-placed political institutions that are capable of examining and discussing climate change hazards and creating an enabling environment that allows rural citizens to adapt.

A closer look at the proposed budget in the costed implementation framework for the NCCP reveals that the entire proposed budget of 3.9 billion USD over a fifteen-year period is shared among the central ministries (Costed Implementation Strategy for NCCP, MWE 2012). While the NCCP embraced the local government system as the key implementation modality, the implementation plan does not include a mechanism for the transfer of funds for local government climate change activities.

To conclude, the implementation strategy for the NCCP has created an imbalance between national and local government over the location of decision-making and fiscal and administrative resources. Power and finance are centralized, while the administrative capacity to address climate challenges is located at the local government level. This is inconsistent with the principle of subsidiarity. Such an implementation strategy, where the central ministry creates projects and controls finance, while districts are reduced to becoming implementing partners, is not likely to provide a cost-effective environment for rural climate change adaptation.

CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S POLITICAL AGENDA

Climate change adaptation is intrinsically a political process, as adaptation is closely linked to questions of power and natural resource management. In particular for climate change-induced emergencies, it is important that politicians at both the national and local government levels be seen to respond. This section analyses the political aspects of climate change in Uganda.

Disasters induced by extreme climate change events such as extreme floods or droughts, combined with a general increased variability in agricultural seasons, have exerted enormous pressure on the rural population of Uganda. The question is to what extent this pressure is being translated into political pressure over governance structures that are closest to the local people, and how. In spite of the elaborate decentralization structure and regular elections of local government councillors, climate change is rarely discussed politically by the latter in Uganda.

Today (2015), three years into implementation of the NCCP, central government funding for climate change adaptation is still absent from all the District Development Plans in Teso Region. As a consequence of the absence of a budget line for climate change adaptation, local government politicians have by and large remained

inactive. Even though local government politicians sometimes becomes under pressure to act when they engage with their constituencies, the general trend is that, without a budget line, climate change adaptation is not on the district council's political agenda. "No funding, no activities", as one local government politician put it.

In addition to the absence of a budget line, qualitative interviews with local government politicians and technical staff suggest that the climate change challenge is perceived as complex and difficult to solve (Friis-Hansen, Bashaasha, Chelli and Aben 2013). Climate change adaptation is surrounded by considerable ambiguity, and for local government politicians it is an issue they find difficult to articulate in a manner that generates popular votes within their constituency. To sum up, climate change adaptation is regarded by local government politicians as a 'lose-lose' issue (no funding and no votes).

Further adding to the ambiguity, the content of local government climate change activities is widely dictated by outside donors, such as central government or NGOs. The content of activities is therefore often the outcome of a top-down global agenda, rather than the results of a participatory planning process and political struggles in the district council. Efforts to mitigate climate change and support for local communities to adapt to the effects of climate change can sometimes be combined, but most often they require different types of emphasis and activities. Mitigation and adaptation are often confused and are not adequately separated by civil servants at the local government level or the wider public. There exists a general bias in international funding and science towards mitigation of climate change, commonly expressed in the practice of planting trees, while ambiguity exists among actors at the local government level regarding how best to support rural communities in introducing adaptation to climate change hazards.

Moreover, the effectiveness and impact of climate change adaptation plans is affected by to whom the implementing civil servants are accountable, that is, upwardly accountable to external donors and/or national government, or downwardly accountable to informed and organized local rural communities. Central government has a social contract to respond to large-scale natural disasters, in particular when they are widely exposed in the media. However, when it comes to 'everyday' climate change hazards that have significant impacts on the rural population, local and national governments' responses have until now been limited in Uganda.

CASE STUDY OF CLIMATE CHANGE AS A PLATFORM FOR ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL ACTION IN AMURIA DISTRICT

Climate change became an important political issue in Amuria District during the 2006 elections. The major contest to become chairman of the district council was fought between the incumbent chairman from the opposition and the existing chairman from the NRM. The incumbent chairman had moved from Katakwi District (the mother district from which Amuria was created) to Amuria “out of frustration over the low service level and accountability of local government towards rural people”.¹ In 2006, he managed to campaign effectively on platforms that criticized the service level of local government in general and the lack of a response from central and local government to food insecurity and upheavals caused by climate stress in particular.

During the election campaign, the challenger candidate toured all the sub-counties and many villages, where he successfully articulated the environmental hazards to which most of the rural population were vulnerable, along with the structural, social and historical causes to poverty. By criticizing how existing district councils had ignored environmental and climate change issues and the very low level of social support, as well as promising that he would address these issues if he were elected, he managed to gain the popular vote. While stressing the importance of environmental and climate change issues in the local government elections in Amuria District is likely to be a unique case, it does show that it is possible to attach votes by addressing climate change. By engaging in an electoral process that seeks to put words to the unsustainable use of the natural environment and the hazards associated with flooding, the politician managed to place climate change on the political agenda in such a way that it generated widespread support among the majority of rural voters while simultaneously disproving the lose-lose perception that is dominant among most local government politicians.

Two incidents during the year following the 2006 elections reinforced the elected chairman's focus on addressing climate change politically in the district council. First, almost immediately after the elections, along with most of Teso Region, Amuria District was affected by the worst floods in memory. Secondly, central government sought to suppress the newly elected LC5 chairman's criticisms politically.

¹ Interview with Mr Julius Ocen, Chairman of Amuria District Council 2007-2011.

One of his first actions as chairman was to establish a verification commission to investigate the causes of poverty in Amuria District. In the midst of the 2007, floods the commission visited all the sub-counties of Amuria District and collected people's statements on the root causes of vulnerability in Amuria. The commission produced a report that documented in detail the causes of poverty and the low level of services in Amuria District. The report underpinned the linkage between the recent wars (fought between central government and rebels, as well as cattle-rustling) and vulnerability of these communities. The report also highlighted the poor management of natural resources as its major focus and showed how the grazing of local cattle in the wetlands was being undermined by government support for the expansion of rice cultivation.

Due to what was perceived to be the sensitive nature of the report, the District Security Officer under the Resident District Commissioner (the representative of central government) prohibited the launching of the report and blocked its publication. This reaction was in part because the Minister for Disasters at the time, who had been born in Amuria District, felt the political process of handling climate disaster issues in the district was undermining his role as the minister responsible for disasters. The chairman of the district council reacted to the suppression of his report by inviting the national newspapers and television producers from Kampala to Amuria and holding a dramatic press conference in which he used the findings of the report to illustrate the effects of floods caused by climate change and publicly criticized the government's inaction, and in particular the Minister for Disaster for his failure to address the plight of the victims of the floods.

Internally within the district, the commission and the political turbulence it created enhanced the chairman's focus on natural resource management, the environment and the role that wetlands play as a buffer against the floods, and therefore its direct links with vulnerability in Amuria. The major outcome of this political focus was that district council requested the environmental officer to develop an environmental ordinance.² This ordinance was passed by the district council and later confirmed by the attorney general, making it a law. The environmental ordinance called for the protection of wetlands and the development of wetland management plans. In addition the environmental ordinance prohibited the cutting of endangered tree species (shea nuts, tamarind species) that were widely used in charcoal burning.

2 Amuria District 2010, Environmental Ordinance.