



## Decentralized climate change responses in Uganda

# CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION LACKS LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

**Local governments in Uganda are the most appropriate level for implementing national climate change adaptation and mitigation policies. They provide the best institutional interface between local people's aspiration and international investments, national policies and civil society initiatives. Yet their contribution is not fully appreciated.**

In Uganda, a recent study reveals a very bleak future for water resources, agriculture and economy at large. The study by Baastel, Metroeconomica and Makerere University predicts that overall losses for food crops are estimated at 1.5 billion USD by 2050 and a 40 percent fall in crop production of cassava, potato and

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen local government funding and capacity for implementing climate change adaptation.
- Enhance content and pace of dialogue between national level and meso-level policymakers on climate change adaptation.
- Create opportunities for local governments to collaborate in response to the transboundary nature of climate change.
- Better understanding of who are vulnerable to climate change and tailor adaptation to their needs.

# Institutions assumed in the National Climate Change Policy either do not exist or are not fully operational at the local government level

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sweet potatoes. It also shows that a 50 percent reduction in the production of coffee and tea combined is estimated to cost about 1,400 million USD by 2050.

In recent years, climate-induced disasters have exerted enormous pressure on governance structures that are closest to the local people – yet they lack the capacity to meet the challenges. At national level, there are a number of disaster management structures including a fully-fledged Ministry for Relief and Disaster Management with environment management and disaster reduction committees, right up to the parish and village levels.

## **Strong local mandates – but lack of resources**

Governance is the manner in which power and resources are used towards realization of development objectives. Good governance entails efficient and effective use of power and resources to bring about desired developmental outcomes. It is facili-

tated by constitutionalism, rule of law, justice, electoral and participatory democracy and the popular participation in social and economic processes among others. Good local governance brings about the desired transformation for the benefit of the people.

In Uganda, like in many other African countries, decentralization is the main form of governance. In 1997, the Government of Uganda adopted a policy which devolved powers for decision-making and implementation to local governments at district and sub-county levels.

Decentralization is both a political and technical process. Political decentralization entails leadership, decision-making, participation, representation and relations with other governance units like the central government. Technical decentralization involves administration, budgeting, planning, supervision, monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

## **THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

The Climate Change and Rural Institutions (CCRI) is a three year research project carried out by Makerere University in collaboration with Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). CCRI Uganda study the principles and strategies for combating effects of climate change at the local and meso-levels of governance.

The current research was conducted in the Teso sub-region with a focus on Awoja wetland system following the 2007 flush floods that destroyed infrastructure, displaced people and disrupted livelihoods and food security in the region. After a document review of the national climate change policy frameworks and a

baseline study in Soroti, Katakwi and Amuria districts, a stakeholder consultative workshop involving nine districts was held in 2013.

This was followed in 2014 by four case studies to gain further insights into how the local governance institutions in the region were responding to climate change effects on natural resources and the population.

One of the case studies involved learning from the experiences of planned adaptation to climate change implemented by UNDP in Mbale, Bududa and Manafwa districts in Mt. Elgon region.



However, given the many challenges faced by local governments, they are usually branded as being inefficient, lacking capacity, corrupt or simply unwilling to support national programmes. Yet the problem seems to lie in local governance resources. Our research has shown that whereas local governments are the focal points for climate change response policy implementation, they are not endowed with enough resources to match their mandates.

### Disaster management is replicated

Our findings show that the drafting of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) in 2007 was a donor driven policy process and with central ministries as implementing partners. With the formulation of Climate Change Policy in 2012, implementation focus shifted to local government. However, support for climate change adaptation has yet to materialize, as no funds have been made



As firewood is scarce, rural people are unable to use burned bricks for constructing houses. Huts built of unburned bricks, as illustrated in the picture, may collapse during floods. Photo: Charles Aben

available to local government for implementing the Climate Change Policy.

Institutions assumed in the National Climate Change Policy either do not exist or are not fully operational at the local government level. However, although local government institutions have limited funding for climate change adaptation, climate change activities are being carried out as rural people engage with existing meso-level institutions or create new institutions in search of ways of adapting. Examples of such activities are developing local by-laws; changed mandates and structures of existing institutions; mainstreaming climate change into work operations of NGOs and CBOs that work together with local governments.

Disaster management structures such as Environment Committees are replicated without funds and staffing. Some districts, like Amuria, have assumed new roles through local ordinances including: demarcation of swamps; institutionalizing local whistle-blowers over unauthorized resource use; and environmental police. Local people and NGOs have

developed innovations for coping with floods such as using dump-proof coarse huts and use of receding waters for rice cultivation. In places like Apeitolim, there have been symbiotic compromises between Karamojong pastoralists and Iteso cultivators.

Similarly national institutions like the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) have been asked to accommodate the local people's needs on the wildlife reserves at Angiisa.

The local people are increasingly getting empowered to plan for climate change adaptation through village and parish disaster reduction committees with innovations like construction of dump-proof huts and using receding flood water to cultivate rice instead of cultivating in the prohibited wetlands.

These processes of institutional bricolage could be greatly enhanced if they were not constrained by grossly inadequate funding. Therefore when central government and or donors in future may finance the climate change policy, it is imperative that these institutional processes should be preserved and up-scaled instead of introducing top-down initiatives.

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Cover photo: Ugandans moving in a queue to collect water in containers © Nordicphotos/Kim Naylor

