

Bridging Research and Policy on Climate Change and Agriculture

Case studies in Africa

Key messages:

- Competing narratives can generate conflicting objectives for adaptation in the agricultural sector
- Identifying policy spaces requires unpacking of narratives, actors and networks
- Policy engagement may involve forging consensus among unlikely actors and creating suitable informal spaces

The Research to Policy for Adaptation initiative

Increasing focus on climate change presents challenges as well as opportunities for the agricultural sector. A key challenge is to ensure that evidence from field level research inform policy responses. The project 'Research to Policy for Adaptation' (RPA) has since 2009 worked with client IDRC/DFID-funded CCAA (Climate Change Adaptation in Africa) project partners in Malawi, Kenya and Tanzania. The aim is twofold: First, to analyse the policy context in which the individual projects are operating, and second, better understand how their research projects can have an impact.

Policy processes have been analysed from three overlapping angles: *narratives and evidence*, *actors and networks*, and *politics and interests*. The analysis forms the basis for identifying so-called *policy spaces* - opportunities for shaping policy in areas related to the projects. In turn, this analysis has formed the basis for project-specific *engagement strategies*, giving advice on how researchers may better make use of such policy spaces.

Some emerging lessons

- **The need to unpack adaptation narratives:** While few are disputing the broader goals around adaptation to climate change, the way problems are formulated and the proposed adaptation strategies reflect different starting points, political values, networks and alliances. The result may be alternative policies undermining each other (see Malawi case study, below). A better understanding of competing narratives and where they come from can help improve policy coherence and avoiding conflicts.
- **Bridging governance levels:** Case studies have highlighted the need for working across different governance levels. Adaptation projects tend to focus on one level (national, local, regional), and facilitating linkages across them can open important policy spaces.

For example, a CCAA pastoralist project in Kenya has been successful in gaining local support, but policy process analysis has shown that bringing in national level actors to engage meaningfully with local realities will be key for connecting local, autonomous adaptation with government adaptation policy and practice.

- **Forging consensus among unlikely partners:** Adaptation projects often work at the interface of strong national level policy narratives and local perceptions, beliefs and preferences. Policy engagement will often require developing a common understanding among very different stakeholders. For example, a key to the success of a CCAA project in Kenya trying to integrate indigenous knowledge of the Nganyi people in meteorological weather forecasting has been engaging in a long process which brought together local weather forecasters (or rainmakers) and national level Met. Department staff, which has gradually allowed them to overcome mutual scepticism and mistrust.
- **Using creative tools to create spaces:** Several of the case studies have shown how the important parts of policymaking often take place outside formal processes. New tools can be an effective way of bringing researchers and policymakers together. An example of this is the Malawi case study's use of the concept of a National Consultative Group (see next page).

Case study topics

- Agro-meteorological advisory services (Kenya)
- Pastoralist livelihoods and adaptation (Kenya)
- Indigenous knowledge and climate risk management (Kenya)
- Malaria epidemic prediction model (Kenya and Tanzania)
- Risk management and vulnerability reduction (Tanzania)
- Crop diversification to reduce farmers' vulnerability (Malawi)
- Urban-rural linkages and climate change impacts (Malawi)

Case example: Crop diversification in Malawi

There is much evidence to show how crop diversification can be a desirable strategy for safeguarding rural livelihoods in a context of uncertain climates. A CCAA project in Malawi has been examining how, for example, crop diversification cushions farmers against the adverse effects of climate change through spreading risks, increasing the levels of income and improving the nutrition and health status of communities.

The RPA research and analysis has aimed at uncovering critical competing narratives and policy responses relevant to adaptation policy processes.

At the national level, the government has committed itself to promoting crop diversification as a strategy for guaranteeing the resilience of farmers' livelihoods. However, the commitment to crop diversification is overshadowed by the political imperative for ensuring food security which has strategically equated with having enough maize at national and household levels.

The focus on equating the availability of maize with food security can be seen in well known interventions such as the fertilizer subsidy programme, which is specifically touted as a mechanism for promoting crop diversification. Yet alternative crops such as millet and sorghum are not available at the designated outlets for farmers to procure, in effect undermining crop diversification.

Crop diversification is further undermined by context specific local level politics. In one case, for instance, it is undermined by the fact that farmers cannot get the water they require for irrigation. A sugar company in their neighbourhood deliberately blocks water to their fields allegedly to make the farmers dependent on it for their livelihoods as strategy of guaranteeing the availability of cheap labour, and hence, maintaining high levels of profitability.

Thus, the policy processes analysis shows that the dominant narrative equating food security with maize is challenged by another (less powerful) narrative, namely that food security in a changing climate would be better served through crop diversification, which in effect the dominant narrative serves to undermine. By understanding this, the CCAA project has been able to work with policymakers to help change policies in Malawi. A key tool for achieving this has been the National Consultative Group (NCG). The NCG has brought together a range of different stakeholders, providing informal venues for sharing experiences and moving forward to ensure policy coherence.



The wider lesson is that in order to identify policy spaces that can be exploited researchers need to be able to apply frameworks for policy and policy process analysis and have a thorough understanding of the general and sector specific policy making architecture at national, district and local levels.

Furthermore, the analysis of policy processes demonstrated that (1) policy processes are not a technical but rather a political process and the nature of the context in which policy processes take place matter a great deal, (2) success in policy influence and engagement is dependent on several interacting variables, (3) policy influence and engagement are resource intensive exercises both in terms of time and finance because success is greatly dependent on sustained efforts over a long period of time, and (4) creating networks and coalitions is just as important, if not more important, than generating new evidence in policy influence efforts.

Future challenges and areas of enquiry

Embedding analysis of policy processes in adaptation research can open spaces to discuss entrenched perspectives of actors and the politics of knowledge production that could be hampering adaptation efforts.

Research for adaptation is happening in an emerging policy terrain, with an increasing number of actors. For example, the private sector is playing new and important roles in service delivery, resource management and food systems. A concerted effort is required to understand the implications of this for adaptation policy processes and for negotiation of research-policy linkages.

Some argue that climate change is an opportunity for addressing a number of challenges in the agricultural sector in an integrated manner. But is there a risk that policy spaces are 'closed down' by those who have an interest in seeing adaptation as a non-political process? Furthermore, how are international adaptation mechanisms facilitating or hindering the types of long-term processes required?

To explore these and other challenges, the Climate Change Theme of the DFID-supported Future Agricultures Consortium is conducting country case studies in Ethiopia and Kenya to map key actor-networks, interests and their narratives around climate change and agriculture to assess policy processes at national and sub-national levels.

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