

Climate Change and Local Governance: Politics, Policies and Prioritization of Adaptation in Adansi North District

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Abstract Climate adaptation remains low on political agendas at the local level in most developing countries despite the reality of impacts being experienced already and a projection of the worsening of same. While the factors that account for the lack of climate action by local governments are countless, politics is the heavy hand behind it all, mediating both policy and the allocation of funds. This study sought to evaluate the awareness of relevant actors in AND on climate change and assess the extent to which they participate in planning. The study also sought to assess the extent to which adaptation policies are captured and budgeted for in the AND District Medium-Term Development Plan (DMTDP) and Composite Budget (CB) (2018-2021). The study took on a concurrent nested mixed methods approach as quantitative data on adaptation policies budgeted for in the DMTDP supplemented the vast qualitative data collected through interviews and semi-structured questionnaires. It emerged that while climate change awareness is appreciable among actors, there is lack of consensus on who should initiate climate action at the local level. 41% of the broad policies in the DMTDP also directly align with strategies adopted in Ghana's Nationally Determined Contributions.

Keywords: climate adaptation, local government, politics, policies, nationally determined contributions

1. Introduction

The role of local governments in climate action has burgeoned over the last two decades. Literature is largely unanimous on the fact that local governments are key actors in the global climate regime especially with the Paris Agreement's 2 °C goal in the fray (Bäckstrand et al., 2017). First, the impacts of climate change such as droughts, landslides, sea level rise, extreme events, heat waves and more are more felt at the local level (Measham et al., 2011). Second, national and international climate action has been sluggish but conversely, local governments have a level of flexibility that can help to hasten response to climate change more so by administrations at the grassroots who know the ins and outs of their locales. Third, land use and regulation, energy and environmental education are all controlled by local governments which places them in a strategic position to address climate change more head-on (Agrawal, 2008).

Across SSA, climate adaptation remains low on political

agendas (Hjerpe et al., 2014) despite the fact that they are the most vulnerable. The reasons that often account for the subpar performance of local governments in developing countries as far as climate change adaptation (and mitigation) are concerned are instigated by both internal and external factors. Ultimately, without support from political leaders, climate adaptation may not receive resources and thus not carry forward. Because the political will required to move adaptation forward is often missing in local administrations across SSA, climate adaptation policies are equally not given priority in local developmental plans. In some instances, climate adaptation policies are totally non-existent (Jakob et al., 2014).

The objectives of this study were therefore to evaluate the awareness of relevant actors in AND on climate change and assess the extent to which they participate in planning. This study also sought to assess the extent to which adaptation policies are captured and budgeted for in the AND District Medium-Term Development Plan (DMTDP) and Composite Budget (CB) 2018-2021.

2. Methods

The study took on a concurrent nested mixed method approach. Purposive sampling method was used because only actors involved in the development and implementation of the DMTDP and are heads of their departments, agencies or organizations would have access to up-to-date information on development in the district.

Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires as well as in-depth interviews. The semi-structured questionnaire was designed to draw out information such as the educational background of respondents including their highest qualification in a science-related subject, the extent to which they participate in the preparation of the DMTDP, how satisfied they are about its contents and how it is implemented. By being partly open-ended, respondents were allowed to express their candid views on the questions that were posed to them without restrictions. However, because the questionnaires were semi-structured, boundaries were created to ensure that respondents didn't digress from the study topic. Data was also taken through a review of literature and documents

including the AND DMTDP and Composite Budget (CB) 2018-2021. Observations were done to corroborate what had been documented.

Socio-demographic variables together with the despondences of respondents were then summarized and presented with the help of tables. The data was grouped into qualitative themes and analyzed with the help of NVivo (QSR 2010) software. For a better measurement of the extent to which AND's DMTDP has adaptation policies and programmes captured and budgeted for in it, Ghana's NDCs document was used as the measuring rod.

3. Results

3.1. Climate change awareness and participation in planning

Findings indicated that all the 23 respondents who were sampled across different departments, agencies and organizations and levels knew about climate change although there were varying explanations as to what it is. This was reflected in how they all understood climate change with 8 (34.7%) of the respondents saying that climate change is a change in rainfall pattern and increasing temperatures, 5 (21.7%) saying that it is the long-term change in the average weather pattern, a further 5 (21.7%) also saying it is simply increasing temperatures, 3 (13%) saying climate change is reduced rainfall while the last 2 (8.7%) respondents said it is the late onset of rainfall. Majority of the respondents—10 (43.5%)—got to know about climate change in school or through their teachers while 5 (21.7%) also got to know about the phenomenon through television. 4 (17.4%), 2 (8.3%), 1 (4.3%) and another 1 (4.3%) respondents learned about climate change through their co-workers, NGO workers, family members or friends and on radio respectively. All respondents also agreed to observing some changes in the climate with 9 (39.1%) and 7 (30.4%) mentioning a change in rainfall pattern as well as rising temperatures respectively. 5 (21.7%) respondents mentioned that they had observed a change in two or more climatic variables while 2 (8.3%) also mentioned that they had observed that the winds have become stronger. Furthermore, 8 (34.8%) respondents said climate change was caused predominantly by widespread deforestation; 6 (26.1%) respondents mentioned that it is due to emissions from developed countries; 3 (13%) respondents mentioned emissions from cars, 1 (4.3%) and another 1 (4.3%) respondent cited industrialization and urbanization while the remaining 4 (17.4%) respondents attributed climate change to two or more of the already mentioned causes.

The next set of questions aimed at assessing the extent to which they participate in planning. The thinking was that, if respondents understood the weight of climate change enough, they will advocate for the appropriate response during and through planning. Thus, when respondents were asked how pressing an issue they perceive climate change to be, 5 (21.7%) said it is extremely pressing, another 5 (21.7%) said it is very pressing, 7 (30.4%) mentioned that climate change is pressing while 6 (26.1%)

said it is quite pressing. None alluded that climate change is not a pressing issue. Consequently, 9 (39.1%) respondents thought it is the responsibility of the district chief executive to initiate climate action at the local level, 3 (13%) thought that it is on central government or national agencies, 2 (8.7%) thought it lies with NGOs, 1 (4.3%) thought it is the DPCU while 8 (34.8%) thought climate action should be initiated at the local level through a collaboration between different agencies. 19 (82.6%) of respondents confirmed that they participate in the preparation of the DMTDP and/or the Annual Action Plans (AAPs). 4 (17.4%) respondents mentioned that they do not participate. Among those who participate, 3 (13%) mentioned that they contribute extremely significantly, 2 (8.3%) said they contribute very significantly, 8 (34.8%) mentioned that they contribute significantly, 4 (17.4%) mentioned fairly while 2 (8.3%) said they contributed only minimally. Finally, none of the respondents said that they were either extremely satisfied or not satisfied with how their contributions to development planning are received and/or captured. 4 (17.4%) said they were very satisfied while 9 (39.1%) respondents and another set of 9 (39.1%) each said they were quite satisfied and also satisfied respectively.

3.2. Adaptation policies planned and budgeted for

Table 1. Adaptation policies that align with the NDCs

Strategic Area	NDC Policy Action	No. of Corresponding Policies in ANDA DMTDP
Sustainable land use	Agriculture resilience building in climate vulnerable landscapes	4
	Value addition-based utilization of forest resources	4
Climate resilient strategic infrastructure	City-wide resilient infrastructure planning	3
	Early warning and disaster prevention	2
Equitable social development	Managing climate-induced health risk	0
	Integrated water resources management	2
	Resilience for Gender and the Vulnerable	6

After a systematic review of the broad policies, programmes and strategies adopted, it was found that the AND DMTDP and CB 2018-2021 fairly align with the Ghana's NDCs document. From a total of 51 broad strategies touching on the thematic areas in the AgendaFor Jobs 2018-2021 document—economic development; social development; environment, infrastructure and human settlements; and governance, corruption and public

accountability—it was found that 21, representing 41%, of the policies directly aligned with particular adaptation strategies stipulated in the NDCs.

For each of the strategic areas in the NDCs namely sustainable land use, climate resilient strategic infrastructure and equitable social development, there were at least, 2 corresponding policies or programmes in the DMTDP. NDC policy actions for gender and the vulnerable had the most corresponding policies, a total of 6. While there were a lot of programmes for promoting health especially for addressing HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis and bridging the infrastructure deficit in the DMTDP, there were no direct policies in the area of climate change and health. Under the NDC policy action, city-wide resilient infrastructure planning, there were 3 policies in the DMTDP. Interestingly, there is also a mitigation policy in the DMTDP which is aimed at improving the management of existing waste disposal sites to reduce GHGs emissions. Furthermore, there are a number of programmes in the DMTDP that are meant to build the capacities of various stakeholders including traditional authorities to improve planning and implementation of policies which is very laudable.

3.3 Factors for the level of priority given to adaptation in the district

It was evident that although climate change awareness is appreciable among respondents who participate directly in planning and implementation of the DMTDP, perceptions among electorates is very low. This makes elected and partisan political actors such as assembly members who are posited for votes to prefer infrastructural projects over climate adaptation policies.

In addition, although a significant number of the respondents had fairly apt knowledge of climate change, there were virtually no climate change and environmental champions in the district. From the interview conducted for the key informant, it emerged that a few NGOs have been very helpful in advancing climate, environmental and adaptation policies and programmes especially in agriculture. However, this had been largely sporadic, leaving more to be done than done.

Furthermore, it was observed that if the various departments and agencies within the district collaborated well enough, they could push for more climate adaptation policies to be implemented. Thus, the policy network has been sparse and ineffective. Several respondents bemoaned of how disunited the various departments are. One respondent said that, “This place is not like my former station. Here, we are not a team and it makes it difficult to promote good things”. Another said that, “In my former district, every Monday morning before work begun, we took turns to share motivational messages and it really brought us together. We don’t have that level of togetherness here and it doesn’t help”.

Other respondents also raised their suspicions concerning the commitment of partisan actors especially those that are elected to the implementation of climate policies. One

respondent laid it out blatantly that, “The interest [in adaptation policies] is simply not there!”

These factors notwithstanding, the data showed that the political climate in the district is receptive enough to climate adaptation policies and that, given a little more funds and support, they will be implemented.

4. Discussion

4.1 Awareness of climate change and participation in planning

From the findings, it was evident that, climate change is not an alien to virtually all respondents. Each respondent had heard of it and could somewhat explain what it is. Also, each respondent was able to pinpoint one, two or more of the factors that have caused climate change. However, opinions on how pressing an issue climate change is wasn’t uniform, thus, possibly giving hint of the reason why climate adaptation policies have not been prioritized. Although no respondent said that climate change is not a pressing issue, some respondents thought that initiating climate action at the local level was the responsibility of central government or national agencies and NGOs (5 respondents representing 21.7%) which further explains the reason for their non-prioritization. Meanwhile, Agrawal (2008) explained how local governments are best posited to champion climate adaptation.

Participation in the planning process in the district was found to be inclusive enough since no respondent had qualms about their contributions being ignored. The assembly also takes the pains to comply with the framework and directions provided by NDPC as far as designing development plans is concerned. This was evidenced in the presence of a number of climate adaptation policies in the DMTDP which had direct bearings with adaptation policy actions captured in the NDCs as well as synergies with the Agenda For Jobs 2018-2024 document. Although the DMTDP is still under implementation, it looks as though climate policies are being relegated to the background. This is true to Obradovich & Zimmeman (2016)’s assertion about SSA election aspirants and voters that, elected actors will rather pursue policies that bring employment or create infrastructure such as schools and hospitals than address climate risks since that is what electorates are likely to vote for.

4.2 Adaptation policies planned and budgeted for in the AND DMTDP and CB 2018-2021

Out of a total of 51 major policies and strategies adopted in the AND DMTDP, 21 policies representing 41%, directly aligned with particular adaptation strategies stipulated in Ghana’s NDCs. There were corresponding policies for each of the 7 policy actions stated in the NDCs in the AND DMTDP with the exception of policies for managing climate-induced health risk which is unsurprising because of the scanty literature in the area especially in the African context. Generally, this was

commendable on the part of AND because local adaptation policies are rare in SSA unless advanced by external bodies such as NGOs. Thus, it would be said that AND are quite ahead of their peers. This was even demonstrated in how a mitigation policy improving the management of existing waste disposal sites to reduce GHGs emissions was captured in the DMTDP.

Furthermore, given that the district is largely a rural and poor, it was also laudable to see that majority of the policy actions in the DMTDP and that align with the NDCs focused on helping the vulnerable and promoting gender parity followed by policy actions for promoting agriculture and sustainable forest resource management. Another positive was the fact that the district recognized the importance of building the capacities of its stakeholders including traditional authorities to improve planning and implementation of sound policies. These notwithstanding, there is still a long mile to go and the main blip was the lack of policies for addressing climate change and health issues.

4.3 Factors for the level of priority given to adaptation in the district

Although climate change awareness among the stakeholders and actors who participate directly in planning is appreciable, climate adaptation policies are not given the priority they deserve because the electorate among whom climate change awareness is minimal prefer infrastructural projects to environmental and risk reduction projects. This confirms the theory that political actors are driven by their interests and just as the literature pointed, in AND, the partisan actors who are the most influential are driven by votes and hence will not risk prioritizing climate adaptation policies over infrastructure. This also brought confirmation to the role of institutions which is that in situations where political leaders such as members of parliament and district chief executives have enormous powers, they are able to veto decisions even though consensus might have been built by the other actors to go in some other direction or advance some other policy.

Also, in some parts of the world, climate action has been effective from the local level because there were

environmental champions who used their influence to advance climate policies. In AND, such champions were not found. Sometimes civil servants are able to instigate climate policies which is what appears to be happening in AND. However, given that the political will is vested elsewhere, such attempts do not see the light of day. Although a handful of NGOs had come in with adaptation programmes and projects from time to time, it has been too sporadic and uncoordinated leaving room for sustained impact to be made.

From the theory, it was also explained that, the denser a policy network is, the better it is because that often implied collaboration between political actors who are the nodes in the network while ideas also flow faster. In AND, it was observed that collaboration between the various actors, departments and agencies wasn't closely knitted which explains why very little has been done by way of climate adaptation. Effective collaboration is key, more so when climate change action requires a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach.

5. Conclusion

While climate change awareness is appreciable among key political actors in AND, climate adaptation has not been profound because there is no consensus as to how urgent an issue it is to merit immediate response as well as who should initiate action at the local level. As a result, although quite a fair number of policies in the AND DMTDP align with Ghana's NDC adaptation (and mitigation) goals, they are not being prioritized. This can be traced partly to the fact that awareness of climate change among the electorate is poor thus, partisan actors especially elected actors pursue policies that bring infrastructure over those that directly address climate risks. Also, collaboration between the various actors and stakeholders is not good enough and this affects efforts at advancing climate adaptation policies as well as driving the multidisciplinary approach needed for addressing climate change. Beyond these factors, there are no environmental champions to lead with their voice and make a strong advocacy for the need for climate adaptation and environmental protection.

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