



JANE HAHNIPANOS PICTURES

About Africa Talks Climate

Africa is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Its effects are already being felt by citizens across the continent, yet too often their voices are absent from national and international climate debate.

Africa Talks Climate is a groundbreaking African-led research and communication initiative, founded on the belief that those worst affected must be better informed in order to understand and effectively respond to their changing climate. It has been launched ahead of the crucial UN climate change summit in December 2009 that seeks to broker a new climate treaty.

The research explores the public understanding of climate change in Africa. Discussions were convened with over 1000 citizens from DR Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, and interviews carried out with nearly 200 policy-makers, religious leaders, business people, journalists and civil society representatives.

It draws upon the expertise of a global advisory network of representatives from research and academic institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donor organisations.

Climate Change in Ghana

Climate change presents an additional stress for Ghanaians already struggling with the challenges posed by ongoing environmental degradation and widespread poverty. The interrelation of climate change with other factors is complex and still evolving.

In recent years the climate in Ghana has become drier and more variable. This has had implications for agriculture, which accounts for a substantial proportion of Ghana's workforce. According to a report by the Ghanaian Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment, climate change is expected to aggravate water stress, endanger food security, increase impacts from extreme weather events and displace many people. The same report states that floods, droughts and sea level rise will significantly increase the transmission of certain diseases. Climate change is projected to impact heavily on hydro energy production, which represents Ghana's primary energy source.

The Ghanaian government is incorporating climate change into its emergency response and disaster preparedness strategies. As well as undertaking research into water resource vulnerability, it has developed energy efficiency programmes. Despite these signs of engagement, its response to climate change is still in its early stages. Increasing the availability and quality of information and engaging the public will be critical to Ghana's response.

KEY INSIGHTS

Knowledge gap

There is very low awareness of either climate change or global warming in Ghana, although the latter appears to be a more accessible concept. Nevertheless, global warming is often incorrectly conflated with ozone depletion.

Trees and weather change

Trees feature prominently in the way Ghanaians understand their changing weather. However, this is explained through the impact of tree-felling on local weather systems, rather than the role trees play in absorbing carbon from the atmosphere.

What solution?

Few people discuss strategies to cope with their changing

weather. Instead, most focus on tree-planting as a solution, because they see it as a way to encourage rainfall. For rural Ghanaians, unpredictable rains and variability in planting seasons are causing their yields to decline. Some consider migration to urban areas to be the only option left to them.

Who will lead the response?

There is high awareness among opinion leaders of the implications of climate change for Ghana's population. Despite this, there is no coordinated national response. Their comments suggest that government plans are in their early stages and are still constrained by a lack of funds. Both media and government are seen to be reactive to climate change, and have not yet framed the issue as a priority.

Ghana: 'earthly things have changed'

THE MAIN FINDINGS

Ghanaians recognise that their weather is changing. Changes in rainfall and wind patterns, increased heat, and variability in planting seasons are frequently cited. "The raining pattern has changed... you cannot predict it", says a woman from Accra. "Growing up, it was not like that; there were times that it rained and times that it did not rain. That has changed." Many people link weather changes over time to reduced agricultural productivity, as a farmer in Jirapa explains: "since the rain is not regular here our food too is not regular. We don't get good harvests." The implications of such changes are also acknowledged, including hunger and north-to-south migration.

Understanding of climate change, however, is limited. There are no direct translations of the

Research methods

This research briefing is based on the findings of 12 focus group discussions with citizens and 18 in-depth interviews with policy-makers, religious leaders, business people, journalists and civil society representatives. Fieldwork took place in May 2009.

Three fieldwork locations (Accra, Brong Ahafo [Berekum and Amomaso] and Upper West Region [Jirapa and Tampoala]) were selected in consultation with a Ghanaian advisory group to represent areas experiencing environmental challenges which have been linked to or are predicted to be exacerbated by climate change. Selection sought to ensure appropriate geographic, ethnic, linguistic and urban/rural diversity.

The focus groups were single sex, and contained approximately eight participants. Within each group participants were of a similar age and socio-economic class or profession. Moderators were the same gender and spoke the same language as participants. The groups were carried out in English, Twi and Dagaare languages.

Verbatim local language and English translations were produced for each focus group and interview. These were systematically coded by a team of international researchers, using a common list of codes to group and cluster the data. The codes were then analysed to identify the insights and emerging themes.

English term, and many Ghanaians understand it to refer to short-term changes in the weather. A typical explanation of climate change given by one man from Accra is that "the climate has changed from dry to wet season". Yet when presented with a definition of climate change, many think it conceivable that human beings could cause weather patterns to change over time, citing deforestation, bush burning, urbanisation and pollution as examples of human activity which impact on the weather. Ghanaians occasionally give alternative explanations. Non-human factors, including shifts in the alignment of the earth in relation to the sun, natural weather cycles and the will of God are sometimes linked to weather change. "It looks as if God has changed his calendar," says a man from Accra. Similarly a man from Amomaso comments: "God is punishing us for our deeds".

Although there is equally low awareness of the term 'global warming,' it appears to be a more accessible concept, provoking references to changes in temperature, excessive heat and reduced rainfall. However, global warming is often inaccurately associated with ozone depletion. A man from Accra explains: "if we look at the amount of carbon dioxide we generate and its effect on the ozone layer, it means we... are going to be consumed by heat." This man is typical in conflating his understanding of the greenhouse effect with his prior knowledge of ozone depletion. People often state that global warming and climate change are caused by holes in the ozone layer allowing increased sunlight (and therefore heat) to enter the atmosphere, rather than identifying the role of greenhouse gases in trapping heat and causing global warming.

Deforestation and displacement

Trees feature prominently in the way Ghanaians understand their changing weather. Many people say that humans are responsible for changes in weather patterns over time, and for increased temperatures because they cut down trees. "Earthly things have changed," says a woman in Jirapa, "and it is because we have started cutting down trees everywhere. Now strong winds come and take our things away, and the rain too does not come regularly." They also believe that deforestation has consequences for the environment more generally. A woman from Berekum explains: "We have cut down all the trees that would protect the fertility of the soil." People add that the impacts of these changes to their weather and environment have consequences for agricultural yields.

People tend not to discuss strategies to cope



A personal story from Ghana



Emefa Jane Ichachu - college administrator, Accra

"The climate has changed drastically. We used to have a wet season and a dry season here in the country, but now the wet season is no more and a greater part of the country has the dry season of late.

"We have seen great changes along the coast. That is where I come from, that is where I live, that is where I grew up... There were some landmarks that I used to notify where the distance from those landmarks to the water and where the water gets to your knee level... of late I realize that the sea has advanced forward to the land meaning that we are losing much of our land... Every time I go there I realise that the sea level has now risen and it has advanced.

"At times, along the Korle Gonno and from the main highway to the beach, it would take you about 200 metres before you entered the water but now it is just about less than 70 metres to the beach... And I have observed that the waves that come are not the constructive waves, they are very destructive and they erode much of our soil away."

with increasing temperatures and declining agricultural productivity. Instead, most focus on tree-planting as a solution, because they see it as a way to encourage rainfall. Despite recognising the value of trees, many rural Ghanaians say that felling trees is a way of making money and is crucial to their survival. A woman in Tampoala explains that "[people] still cut and carry firewood to Jirapa to sell so that they can buy food... when you confront them,

"I will run away south to look for food"

they tell you they cannot stop cutting trees to sell for firewood or they and their children will die of hunger." Indeed, for many rural Ghanaians in northern areas of the country, migration to southern towns or cities is seen as one of the few options remaining if conditions continue to worsen. When asked what she would do if crop failure in her area were to become widespread, a woman in Tampoala responds: "I will run away south to look for food."

Opinion leaders: how to manage and change

Understanding of climate change varies among opinion leaders in Ghana. Although this research relies on a relatively small number of interviews with opinion leaders, these suggest that the most detailed knowledge of climate change is restricted to NGO representatives and academics working in this area. All agree, however, that climate change has the potential

to impact severely on the lives of ordinary Ghanaians. One community leader describes climate change as a "catastrophe", adding that Ghana is "on the brink of disaster".

Opinion leaders from different sectors of Ghanaian society give detailed descriptions of the impacts of climate change on local populations. An academic describes the impacts on the population of Anloga, a town in the Volta region of Ghana: "we have massive sea level rise there as a result of climate change... at certain times of the year, you have almost the entire population being displaced. You have farms washed away; you have salinisation, salt intrusion into their drinking water". A religious leader explains the implications of a changing climate for fishermen: "sometimes, they go to sea and do not get anything, or sometimes they harvest at a time when they did not expect fish to be there." Another describes the threat that climate change poses for

agriculture: "if farmlands are being destroyed and if the environment is under threat, people move away from agriculture... not many farms are mechanised. So if the few farmers are distracted, livelihoods will be threatened".

Yet despite their understanding of the implications of climate change for the population, it is unclear who will lead Ghana's response. Very few opinion leaders mention strategies to help people cope with and adapt to their changing weather. The most frequently mentioned interventions are government-led afforestation programmes. Both the government and the media responses to climate change are seen as reactive and limited in scope, responding to disasters that are

rarely identified as being the result of climate change. Representatives from both sectors point out that they operate according to tight budgetary restrictions, limiting the resources that can be directed towards climate change programmes. A government representative explains that "issues that appear a little remote from our basic needs are not given the needed attention". The comments of one religious leader suggest that the issue of climate change appears less remote to local government, which "has been more effective at addressing issues on climate change than the national government". NGOs are also recognised for

their role in delivering programmes that "teach us how we can manage and change", explains a local traditional ruler:

While opinion leaders from several different sectors recognise the importance of engaging with climate change in a global context, many prioritise the need to communicate the subject to Ghanaians in a way and in words relevant to them. As one NGO representative explains, people "don't think 'climate change', but they know that something is happening with regards to the weather". A representative from a community organisation says that people need to "evolve the concept themselves rather

than you evolving it and imposing it upon them". Others say the focus of climate change information provision should be on issues pertinent to the lives of people who depend on the land. A media representative explains that "messages should be tailored to suit specific communities", before emphasising the needs of rural communities: "if you go to the village, you either talk to them in their dialect or show them a video... A good picture is worth a thousand words and they tell their own stories". If Ghana is to address the challenges of climate change, the information needs of its worst-affected people must be a priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The information and communication needs of Ghanaian citizens must be at the heart of any national response to climate change.
- A successful information provision strategy should recognise that Ghanaians' response to climate change will be determined by the availability and quality of information.
- Of immediate concern are the needs of information-poor rural communities already struggling with the challenges posed by climate variability and poverty. For them, climate change represents a tipping point. If these communities are to survive, there is a need for targeted information and resources that will enable them to cope with the impacts of climate change.
- All evidence suggests that international climate change discourse is inaccessible to most Ghanaians. There is a need for information and debate that harness Ghanaians' understanding and experience of their changing weather and environment to create a relevant discourse that promotes citizen engagement in Ghana's response to climate change.

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All climate change impacts described in 'Climate Change in Ghana' are fully sourced from the following references:

UNFCCC (November 2007), *Ghana's Experience at Integrating Climate Change Adaptation into National Planning*

Drunen M.A. Van, R. Lasage, and C. Dorland (Cabi Publishing 2006), *Climate Change in Developing Countries: Results from the Netherlands Climate Change Studies Assistance Programme*

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