



DIETER TELEMANS/PANOS 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 Kenya

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

In Kenya it is predicted that climate change will shift rainfall patterns, cause more extreme droughts and flooding and accelerate the spread of disease, including malaria. These impacts will further complicate the chronic food, water and energy shortages that already affect the lives of most Kenyans.

At the time of writing, many of Kenya's provinces were suffering from severe drought and rising food insecurity. Droughts and extreme rainfall are catching farmers unprepared and contributing to severe flooding and displacement. Pastoralists and farmers are increasingly in conflict over dwindling water resources. Those living in Kenya's cities and regional towns are also affected. Rural-to-urban migration has stretched Kenya's public infrastructure to its limits.

The Kenyan government has only just begun to formulate its response to climate change. Increasing the availability and quality of information and engaging the public will play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of this response.

## KEY INSIGHTS

### Knowledge gap

Current climate change terminology fails most Kenyans. Most recognise neither the term nor the concept of 'climate change'. While Kenyans have noticed their weather is changing, most do not understand these changes in a global context.

### A human connection

Global warming is a more accessible concept than climate change to most Kenyans. They have noticed recent increases in temperature and have connected these changes to human activity.

### Trees and weather change

Kenyans attribute changes in their

weather principally to deforestation. They link this to their understanding of the impacts of tree-felling on the local environment and weather. Most do not recognise the important role that trees play in absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

### Trees and adaptation

Kenyan citizens and opinion leaders alike see tree-planting as the primary way to restore the country's natural resources and counteract the impacts of climate change.

### Limited response

The comments of opinion leaders suggest that the Kenyan government's response to climate change could be developed further in terms of scope and implementation.

# Kenya: waiting for the rains

## THE MAIN FINDINGS

As drought ravages the country once again, many Kenyans are struggling to adapt to the effects of climate change. Yet across Kenya, awareness of the term and concept of climate change is limited. Most Kenyans tend to think that 'climate change' describes general changes in the weather or the seasons. The lack of a suitable Swahili translation for the term 'climate change' further hampers understanding.

Kenyans are more familiar with the term and concept of global warming. Although there are similar translation difficulties, the concept is more accessible, as people have noticed a rise in temperatures and connect this to human activity. Most do not understand the concept's global context. Instead, Kenyans connect local increases in temperature to human activity

## Research methods

This Research Briefing is based on the findings of 12 focus group discussions with citizens and 17 in-depth interviews with policy-makers, religious leaders, business people, journalists and civil society representatives. Fieldwork took place in May and June 2009.

Three fieldwork locations (Ahero, Isiolo and Nairobi) were selected in consultation with a Kenyan 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, Swahili, Luo and Turkana.

Verbatim Swahili 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.

in their immediate surroundings and have little knowledge of the global greenhouse effect. When presented with the concept of global warming, people connect it to human activities that they associate with development and degradation of their natural environment. They generally believe that two types of human activity are causing temperatures to rise: deforestation and pollution.

Those who link deforestation to global warming do not understand the role of forests as carbon sinks, but instead say that trees attract rain and provide shade, both of which play a role in cooling the local area. Therefore when trees are cut down, the area gets warmer. They connect pollution to heat, but do not relate pollution to greenhouse gas emissions and the mechanism of global warming. Rather, they see, and in some cases feel, pollution changing the air around them. The examples of pollution that people give range from car exhausts to perfume to the burning of firewood.

Some Kenyans offer alternative explanations for rising temperatures that suggest they understand that pollution has wider effects, beyond simply warming the area around them or harming the immediate environment. A male pastoralist from Isiolo explains, "When the smoke is released into the atmosphere it affects the clouds and as a result of this the sun becomes very hot." In urban areas, some Kenyans inaccurately associate global warming with their knowledge of ozone depletion. Very few Kenyans, whatever their level of knowledge of global warming, link the concept to the known effects of climate change, such as the increased frequency of droughts and floods.

### The importance of trees

Kenyans are not aware that their changing weather is related to climate change but instead connect it to deforestation. They see that human settlement, farming and charcoal burning are resulting in the loss of forested land and that unreliable rainfall has brought crop failure, loss of livestock and increased food prices. These changes are having a profound effect on people's livelihoods, as a woman from Isiolo explains: "We have not had enough rain for the last four years and the animals we have get little or no grass. They begin to get diseases that are related to famine and die." Kenyans' knowledge of the role of trees in the water cycle causes them to connect deforestation with the changes in rainfall patterns and the hardships these bring.



"We have not had enough rain for the last four years. The animals begin to get diseases that are related to famine and die."

Rather than discussing strategies to cope with a lack of water, most people focus on tree-planting as a solution, because they see it as a way to encourage rainfall. Despite this, Kenyans say that felling trees is a way of making money and a way out of hardship. A man in Isiolo is typical in saying: "It is not our wish to cut down trees for burning charcoal, it is just that we lack other means of survival. So we cut down trees so that we can earn some money to buy food." Indeed for most rural Kenyans, the prospects of staying on their land and surviving seem bleak. Migration to towns and cities and away from their traditional livelihoods is seen as one of the few remaining options by most rural Kenyans. They do not know where else to turn.

### Opinion leaders: how to respond?

It is unclear to whom Kenyans can look to lead the country's response. Although this research relies on a relatively limited number of interviews with Kenyan opinion leaders, their comments suggest that rural community leaders are the least informed about the subject, despite being well positioned to encourage their communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

In comparison, opinion leaders based in Nairobi, including those from national government, media, NGO and private sector are relatively well-informed about climate change. They feel that Kenya's natural environment has been seriously degraded and that Kenyans' traditional methods of natural

## A personal story from western Kenya



### Helen Muga, businesswoman and politician

"I lead women in political matters, so that we...can ensure the politicians know where they have not served us well. I also farm maize, beans and rice, but nowadays the harvest is not very good at all.

"A few years ago, we used to get good harvests but recently it has been very hot. Whenever you plant, after about two months the crops begin to wilt; when it rains the floods soak the crops and they become unhealthy so we don't get enough food. Also here in Kano plains, when there is heavy rain the rainwater washes away all the top soil and sometimes even the crops, so the land has become very unproductive.

"Also, the sun heats up our soil very quickly. Like now when it is raining, the soil is okay but if it doesn't rain for just two weeks, the ground will have so many cracks and all the crops will dry up. So we would like to get fast-maturing crops which would be ready in two months so that we would be able to harvest even with our little rain and benefit a bit.

"In the past it was so good, there were many trees, the air was fresh, but the way people have cut down trees and other people just leave their cattle to graze anywhere, even on people's farms...we don't profit at all. Recently people invaded this area with their power saws and they [felled] all the trees until our land has remained naked, we are no different from a desert.

"In this area we use water for irrigation and at one time the government stopped helping us in this irrigation programme so for some time in fact we had stopped planting rice, people lacked food and there was serious famine. Irrigation is the only way to farm if you are to get anything. You cannot rely on rain alone in this area."

*Translated from Swahili and Luo.*

resource management have, in the words of one opinion leader, "broken down".

Kenyan leaders also understand the difficulties of communicating about climate change and realise that there is a need to do so in a way that is relevant to people's lives. "We still think of it as a foreign concept. We can't relate it to the high price [of food]. We can't relate the high electricity cost. We can't relate water rationing to climate change," says one opinion leader from the media. Many think the term climate change is confusing to most Kenyans.

One opinion leader explains the need for "a definition which is so simple, without these words of adaptation and mitigation".

Despite a strategy currently in development, Kenya's policy response to climate change is lagging. Aside from mentioning afforestation initiatives, few opinion leaders can describe how Kenya is responding to the impacts of climate change. Similarly to the public, they see tree-planting as the primary solution.

The narrow focus on tree-planting limits the wider implementation of adaptation methods

and fails to take into account the limited resources that restrict the capacity of most Kenyans to adapt. As such, many opinion leaders believe that adaptation is only really possible after development. One opinion leader states, "Once poverty is tackled, I think everything else will fall in place. Because it will be easier to tell a guy who is well fed, that hey you guy, you now need to go and plant a tree instead of destroying that one that you got." If Kenya does not diversify its adaptation strategy there is a danger that its response will be insufficient to meet the challenges of climate change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The information and communication needs of Kenyan citizens must be at the heart of any national response to climate change.
- A successful information provision strategy should recognise that Kenyans' 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 Kenyans. There is a need for information and debate that harness Kenyans' understanding and experience of their changing weather and environment to create a relevant discourse that promotes citizen engagement in Kenya's response to climate change.

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

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