



FRED HOOGVORST/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 Uganda

Climate change presents an additional stress for Ugandans 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. A recent report by the Global Humanitarian Forum, led by Kofi Annan, labels Uganda as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change.

Rainfall has become more erratic and intense, bringing floods, landslides and soil erosion. Drought and water scarcity has triggered internal migration, including the movement of cattle herders from the Karamoja region. Malaria is increasingly reported in areas where it was once rare. In semi-arid areas, tick-borne diseases have become rampant. Recent reports for Oxfam and DFID Uganda suggest that temperature rise could significantly impact upon Uganda's coffee production and freshwater fisheries, with profound consequences for health, livelihoods and foreign export earnings.

The Ugandan government is responding to climate change. As well as participating in international negotiations, it has developed a National Action Plan for Adaptation (NAPA). This process engaged civil society and identified raising awareness of climate change as a priority. 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

Neither the term nor the concept of 'climate change' is recognised by most Ugandans. Although there is equally low awareness of the term global warming, it appears to be a more accessible concept but is frequently incorrectly conflated with ozone depletion.

Trees and weather change

Ugandans think deforestation can affect their weather. This is explained with reference to the impact of tree-felling on local weather. Most do not recognise the important role that trees play in absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

A local problem...

There is low awareness

among the Ugandan public that the environmental problems they face are likely to have causes that extend beyond their own continent.

...or a global problem?

Yet most Ugandan opinion leaders consider climate change a global problem which needs a global solution. In many cases they suggest that the impetus for this solution should come from developed countries.

Communication gap

Ugandan opinion leaders are concerned that the public is ill-informed about climate change. They stress that communication around climate change needs to be relevant to people's lives and their understanding of their environment.

Uganda - already facing the heat

THE MAIN FINDINGS

Ugandans agree that the weather is changing, but the term 'climate' is rarely used, or is used interchangeably with the word 'weather'. Excess heat, and increased variability of rains and planting seasons are frequently cited: "there used to be a season for rain and a season for planting, but these days we no longer follow those seasons because these days the rain falls any time". Many people link weather changes over time to reduced agricultural productivity, as one rural farmer from Fort Portal explains: "crops that I used to grow in the 90s, when I grow them these days they don't give enough yield". The implications of such changes, including hunger and crime, are also acknowledged.

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.

The three fieldwork locations (Kampala, Fort Portal, and Soroti) were selected in consultation with a Ugandan advisory network 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, Luganda, Ateso and Ruturo languages.

Verbatim local language transcripts and full 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.

Understanding of the term 'climate change' is limited, and many link it to short-term changes in the weather. A typical description of climate change given by one young man from Kampala is "a change from rainy season to dry season". Yet when presented with a definition of climate change, many think it conceivable that human beings could cause weather patterns over time to change, citing deforestation, urbanisation and pollution as examples of human activity with an impact on the weather. Trees "attract rain" and provide shelter and in cutting them down, people explain, there is "less rain" and "more heat". Similarly, pollution and urbanisation are directly linked to increases in ambient heat. Few people, however, refer directly to fossil fuel use or carbon emissions despite the crucial role these factors play in climate change. People occasionally ascribe changes in the weather to non-human factors including the influence of the sun and the moon, natural weather cycles and the will of God. "Sometimes God himself is the one who plans that this year it shall rain like this and shine like this," says a woman from Soroti, "it is not man all the time [who causes changes in the weather]."

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. Global warming is sometimes inaccurately conflated with ozone depletion. A man from Kampala explains: "Fumes that come from the industries, cars and fridges... tend to penetrate the ozone layer and in the process they create holes in it and thus the heat coming down to earth and creating the excess heat." This man groups CFC emissions (from fridges) together with carbon emissions (from industry and cars), and in doing so incorporates global warming into his prior knowledge of ozone depletion. This confusion is widespread among the few people with this prior knowledge. They state that global warming and climate change is caused by increased ultraviolet light (or 'sun') entering the atmosphere due to ozone depletion, rather than identifying the role of greenhouse gases in global warming in trapping heat in the atmosphere. This is complicated by the dual role of CFCs: they break down ozone, but are also a greenhouse gas, so contribute to global warming.

The fact that people often use visual imagery to make sense of ozone depletion suggests that visual explanations of global warming – for example a "growing blanket of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere" – could be used to convey the science of climate change in a way that is accessible to many people.



ANDREW MCCONNELL/PANOS PICTURES

Only a local issue?

There is very little awareness among Ugandans that the environmental problems they experience are likely to have causes that extend beyond their locale, even less their own continent. Only a very small number refer to the culpability of developed countries in causing global warming or climate change. For example, in Kampala, pollution is a key concern for inhabitants. People attribute pollution to poor waste disposal and fumes from cars and industry. Yet even when they make links between pollution and weather changes, people tend to identify changes in local weather and connect them to pollution produced locally.

Trees and their destruction are a strong presence in the Ugandan consciousness, perhaps as their disappearance is highly visible; many people can trace the loss of trees and forests over their own lifetimes. As a young man from Fort Portal tells us, "deforestation was a thing not heard of but now it is everywhere. [Our] ancestors used to protect the environment like forests because it brings rain."

Many Ugandans say that humans are responsible for changes in weather patterns over time and increased temperatures, because they cut down trees. "Man's activities like cutting forests for the purposes of agricultural activities or settlement, this negatively affects the rain cycle hence causing things like global warming."

Most Ugandans are aware of the role of trees within the water cycle, but do not refer to the role of trees in removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, nor link the burning or felling of trees to the release of carbon. Further, many think that the removal of tree cover causes more sun to reach the earth and leads to a rise in temperature. As a young man from Fort Portal explains, "when trees are in place they control temperature on the ground but when

there are no trees the temperature affects the ground directly".

Importantly, the role of trees appears to be a lens through which Ugandans can make sense of the impact of human activity on the weather. Although at present people's understanding of trees centres on their role in the water cycle, the widespread public appreciation of trees could provide an opportunity to inform people about trees and carbon, and so introduce the concepts of global warming and climate change.

Opinion leaders: Poor hardest hit

Opinion leaders from across Uganda agree that the poorest people will be hit hardest by climate change. Rural populations are already "facing the heat", says one journalist. People "do not have enough money to buy basic needs and necessities... people can't produce their own food". But poverty is not just a question of economics. This research suggests that rural people at the frontline of climate change suffer not just from food and water insecurity, but from poverty of information. One policy-maker explains that environmental crises always

"Climate change is a new term... you have to interpret it into the local reality"

A personal story from eastern Uganda

Hamza Moita, security officer, Amuria Town Council

"I was born in 1973 and all this time I have been in Amuria, except during the insurgency, when I relocated to Mbale - I returned to Amuria in 2000. Over the years the weather keeps on changing: we used to receive a lot of rain in March and April, but you find that now there is terrible sunshine until April - and in May, you find that it rains today and shines tomorrow, which makes seasons unpredictable and disorganises farming patterns.

"In 2007, we had a lot of floods in Amuria district, this affected me and my community. The people could not cultivate, a lot of soil was washed away, roads were washed away, and this caused a lot of hunger, because the food which people tried to put down in the soil was washed away by floods. In places like Kapelabyong the people had to move to internally displaced peoples' camps, and some migrated to other districts.

"We have tried to adapt to the situation. What we have done here, with the help of my environment officer, is started to plant trees... whoever cuts down a tree must plant a tree.

"For the people of Amuria there is a threat of desertification in the future... there is also a threat of hunger and a threat of death; people are going to die."

hit the poor hardest, wherever they are in the world. In this respect climate change is no different: "Certainly the most vulnerable people are the poor people both here in Uganda and elsewhere, even in the USA. When New Orleans was hit by Katrina the people who suffered most are the poor. The rich just jumped into their vehicles and drove off for another two or three weeks. So they will both be affected, but the impact will not be as much as on the poor fellow in Uganda."

There is recognition among opinion leaders that Uganda is among the countries that has done the least to contribute to climate change, and will be among the worst affected by its impacts. Although this research relies on

relatively few interviews with Ugandan opinion leaders, it appears that representatives from the government and private sector feel that developed nations are responsible and should play a part in finding solutions.

Many think that the impetus for this solution should come from developed countries, as one businessperson explains: "The developed countries should at least agree on joining forces with clearly defined targets and goals that can be easily measured so that we can try and find some global approach." Representatives from the business sector express concern that economic growth could be hindered and production costs could increase if attempts to

tackle climate change are not implemented. However, they point out that planning and investment can allow for economic growth that does not impact so severely upon the environment.

Opinion leaders know that the public is aware of the changes in their weather: No-one, as one opinion leader explains, has yet presented a diagnosis that allows Ugandans to understand these changes as the "symptoms" of climate change. As one NGO representative proposes, "because climate change is a new term ... you have to interpret [it] into the local reality or peoples' understanding of seasonal changes".

The importance of capturing those local realities is recognised by representatives from the media. One journalist stresses the effectiveness of using images to report on climate change. "I believe one thousand words can be told in a single picture", he says, "and in a way people really understand."

There is a consensus among most opinion leaders that communicating the meaning of climate change is not simply a case of translating the term into local languages. Instead it requires an interpretation that corresponds to people's understanding of their environment, and addresses the reality of their everyday lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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