

# Barriers to climate change policy responses for urban areas: a study of Tamale Metropolitan Assembly, Ghana

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Climate change has emerged as an urgent issue around which both ideas of development and practice are crystallising both in the North and South. However, in this discourse the concern with climate change seems not to dwell much on seeking a better understanding of the barriers to climate change policy responses in different contexts. This paper explores the extent to which climate change ideas are received and converted into policy and programmes by local governments, with reference to Tamale Metropolitan Assembly in Ghana. This study highlights that limited perception of development co-benefits, and the tensions in negotiating national directives and local priorities constrain policy responses to climate change.

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## Introduction: the context and research questions

Climate change has emerged as an urgent issue around which both ideas of development and practice are crystallising both in the global North and South. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [1, [Article 3: Principle 4](#)] calls for climate change measures to be integrated into national development programmes. The role of sub-national governments is crucial for the integration of climate change policy ideas in development planning [2–5]. Despite this recognition, the national and urban sub-national contexts of most sub-Saharan African countries present a dim image. Several authors have noted variations in, and a marginalisation of, the urban context in the contents of national climate change policy on one hand, and limited initiatives by the majority of urban governments [6,7,8<sup>••</sup>]. However some African cities have made

promising responses to climate change [9<sup>••</sup>]. This paper presents an opportunity to revisit these assertions in the context of climate change policies, with particular reference to Tamale metropolis in Ghana.

The extent to which national programmes and policy ideas, aimed at integrating climate change in local development plans, are received and responded to at the sub-national government level is not well known. This paper investigates the extent to which climate change policy initiatives are reflected in metropolitan development plans in Ghana and proposes an explanatory framework for this manifestation. It reviews literature to synthesise various theoretical perspectives on the responses to climate change policies. The conceptual framework hypothesises that weak external pressure, absent normative mechanisms, limited perceptions of development and political co-benefits, and inadequate engagement in city–city networks shape limited policy responses to climate change. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and a review of policy documents, the policy responses by Tamale Metropolitan Assembly are presented followed by discussions on how the conceptual framework relates to the empirical evidence. This paper presents a part of a comparative study carried out in three Ghanaian metropolitan areas namely, Accra, Kumasi and Tamale [10].

## Conceptual framework for climate change policy responses

Various scholars [6,11–13] have attempted to explain the rationale for responses by state and urban governments to the novel ideas on planning for a changing climate. The Global Report on Human Settlement [14] similarly emphasises that local contextual factors such as governance capacity challenges, namely institutional, technical and economic and political, are crucial in shaping urban policy responses. However, taking this standpoint tends to ignore the macro-level exogenous processes such as the contribution of the international political context, considering that climate change policies originated as an international issue [15]. In addition, the influence of multi-level governance structures [16<sup>•</sup>], international actors, and national agencies [17,18] should not be overlooked when investigating climate change responses in urban areas. Consequently drawing on various disciplines, an integrated conceptual framework is advocated, which considers that local, national and international factors have the possibility of shaping urban governments' policy responses to climate change. External pressure,

co-benefits, normative imitation and peer pressure to emulate are presented next as possible factors shaping the adoption of a novel policy.

#### **External pressure: central government development directives**

External pressure from international organisations has been identified as playing a contributory role in influencing the adoption of new policies [19]. This takes various forms, subtle or overt; from direct conditionalities attached to lending facilities, to manipulating economic costs, monopolisation of expertise and information and even through treaties on weaker states [20]. Weyland [19] argues that in an era of globalisation, external factors, specifically pressure from international organisations, contribute significantly to inducing countries to adopt new policies. Climate change appears to be a major current concern for development lending agencies [21–23]. International financial institutes, such as the World Bank, have to a large extent been influential in financing national governments' initiatives for urban development projects in developing countries [24,25]. Yet top down financing of climate change by international agencies and national governments have been predominantly ineffective [8••].

Studies on the external pressure to adopt a new policy have focused on the macro-scale, investigating nation states and international financial institutions. The subordinate position of local governments in the hierarchy of government structures in most countries, despite decentralisation efforts, is a possible factor influencing the response to national development guidelines and funding directives on climate change. Metropolitan governments have varying degrees of autonomy and may resist, concede to these directives, or take their own initiatives outside national frameworks, as in some South African cities such as Cape Town and Durban [16•,26,27]. This implies that the extent to which national climate change agendas are adopted would be determined by the degree to which the guidelines from national government are enforceable and the level of metropolitan government's autonomy.

#### **Co-benefits of climate change policy ideas**

Rationalists argue that individuals and organisations adopt purely rational and calculative decision making processes based on expected benefits [28]. However the tendency towards impulsive, temporally myopic decision making as well as the systematic inconsistencies in behaviour poses theoretical challenges for rational choice [29]. There is a wide 'deviation of actual behaviour from the normative model' which rational utilitarian theory fails to address [30]. As Smith and May [31] note, there are a range of political variables limiting the extent of choice available as well as the power of vested interests.

The economic benefits of adopting a climate change policy (as well as the economic costs of not responding) have been extensively dealt with in the influential report on the economics of climate change [32]. There are both direct and collateral benefits (co-benefits) of adapting and mitigating to climate change, also referred to as multiple benefits and synergies [33,34•]. Cape Town [35:6] municipality identifies the co-benefits of climate change policies as improved service delivery, financial stability in the city operations and improved air quality. Mokwena [36:16] also noted that adopting climate change policies by the City of Cape Town is beneficial for addressing domestic concerns of energy security and protecting biodiversity for tourism. For the Lagos State Government [37•], adopting a climate change strategy is a means for protecting populations living in informal settlements and affluent settlements, such as Lekki, Ikoyi and Victoria Island. It appears that, for local governments, the potential of climate change policies to address other development needs is crucial for their adoption. Though the development co-benefits may be obvious, political and electoral incentives also exist.

The likelihood of adopting a new policy is also closely related to the political consequences and search for electoral rewards, as well as to its timing in the electoral cycle. Gilardi *et al.* [38] stress that in decision making, policy makers are interested in the political consequences of adopting a policy, particularly whether there are electoral rewards, sanctions or a back-lash ascribed to the new policy. The interest in the political consequences becomes more pronounced given the limited nature of the electoral cycle and policy makers' tendency to seek re-election after a term in office [39]. This presents a 'political' dimension and imposes an often short time frame for political decision making about the co-benefits of adopting a policy and would be explored in the context of Ghana. The potential co-benefits of climate change policies would determine the extent to which it is granted attention in metropolitan development plans.

#### **Quest for legitimacy through adoption**

The preceding section highlighted the perceived co-benefits of policy ideas as a possible determinant for policy adoption. Though a probable determinant, it assumed that decision making is usually a rational, calculated process; which is not always the case when normative factors are considered [30]. When a new policy attains normative status, governments are induced to adopt it in the quest for legitimacy and so as not to appear 'deviant' [40]. Norms are defined as 'informal rules that groups adopt to regulate and regularise group member behaviour' [41:47]. Sikkink *et al.* [42:8] explain normative status, from a human rights perspective: 'these prescribe rules for appropriate behaviour and help define identities'. So, an idea attains normative status when it is considered generally appropriate behaviour and assists

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