



## Differentiated livelihoods, local institutions, and the adaptation imperative: Assessing climate change adaptation policy in Tanzania



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 22 April 2014

Received in revised form 2 October 2014

#### Keywords:

Climate change adaptation  
Adaptation policy  
Development policy  
Local institutions  
Livelihoods  
Tanzania

### ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the framings and priorities of adaptation in Tanzania's climate policy and examines the implications for the role of local institutions and differentiated rural populations in climate change adaptation. Although Tanzania lacks a "stand alone" climate policy, Tanzania's National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS) provide the most comprehensive statements of the central government's framing of adaptation and its priorities with regard to adaptation. In assessing discursive framings of adaptation, we find that the dominant policy discourse constructs an anti-politics of adaptation through its framing of climate change as an urgent and generalized threat to development while failing sufficiently to address the complex governance and social equity dimensions of climate change adaptation. The technocratic prescriptions of Tanzania's NAPA and NCCS converge with similar prescriptions found in Tanzania's national development policies, such as the major agricultural development initiative *Kilimo Kwanza*. Adaptation challenges identified by communities in Mwanga District demonstrate complex local institutional and resource tenure questions that are not addressed in climate policy but which require policy attention if social equity in climate change adaptation is to be achieved.

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### The anti-politics of the adaptation imperative

More than twenty years ago, Ferguson (1990) introduced the notion of an 'anti-politics machine' in explaining how exclusively technical discourses of development and simplified accounts of societies serve to erase the politics of development and create a chasm between external development agendas and local realities. We find that concept useful to understanding climate change adaptation policy in Tanzania and other least developed countries (LDCs), where concern for integrating climate change adaptation into development policy comes amidst a growing sense of urgency surrounding what has been called the 'adaptation imperative' (Ki-moon, 2009; World Resources Institute, 2011). Calls to *Adapt Now!* (Leary et al., 2008) from academic, policy, and development circles reflect this urgency, as climate extremes that may be the

harbinger of future climate change are already having substantial negative impacts on livelihoods and resources of the most vulnerable in developing countries (O'Brien et al., 2012; Field et al., 2014). For example, in its assessment of African adaptation, the language of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) is unequivocal: "for many in Africa adaptation is not an option but a necessity" (Boko et al., 2007: 452).

Amidst this sense of urgency, calls to integrate or mainstream adaptation into development policy have proliferated (Davidson et al., 2003; Klein et al., 2005; Lim et al., 2005; Mwandosya, 2006). In the international policy arena, adaptation is now at the center of negotiations within the United Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework, resulting in an internationally-mandated process through which LDCs identify national priorities through the development of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) in anticipation of adaptation finance through various mechanisms (UNFCCC, 2001). Mainstreaming is a central concern because the integration of adaptation policy into

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LDC development policy may take advantage of synergies between rural development, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation (Wangui et al., 2012; Wisner et al., 2014; O'Brien et al., 2006). Indeed, progress toward global development priorities enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals will likely require comprehensive inclusion of climate change adaptation alongside disaster risk reduction concerns in development policies (Schipper and Pelling, 2006). In the run up to the end of a decade of work on disaster reduction, the UN agency coordinating these efforts states (UNISDR, 2014: 6):

Climate change is arguably the most important underlying disaster risk factor and is implicated in the increase in disasters worldwide. Drought, desertification, flooding and environmental degradation, (such as deforestation, erosion and loss of biodiversity) are all affected by climate change and have far-reaching consequences in terms of food and water security. It is therefore crucial that in [the second Hyogo Framework of Action guidelines for disaster reduction]... disaster risk reduction efforts not be isolated from climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

Running parallel to the adaptation imperative and calls for policy integration, there is growing concern for advancing dialogue on equity, fairness, and justice related to the benefits and burdens of adaptation choices (Adger et al., 2006; O'Brien, 2012; Paavola and Adger, 2006; Pettit, 2004). These are political issues, and this scholarship has identified several grounds on which adaptation may be framed as an inherently political process. At the micro-scale, adaptive practices undertaken by communities reflect unequal access to natural and other resources underpinned by political relationships within communities and between communities and the wider political-economy (Eriksen and Lind, 2009). Additionally, the benefits and burdens of specific adaptation choices or trajectories are unevenly shared at community, sub-regional, national, and international scales.

Furthermore, policies and interventions undertaken in the name of climate change adaptation could serve to reinforce or exacerbate existing inequalities and patterns of differentiated climate risk (Marino and Ribot, 2012). Where such policies and interventions ignore societal differentiation in livelihoods, resource access and resultant climate risk, adaptation could be fundamentally at odds with core notions of sustainable development and even threaten progress toward poverty alleviation (Eriksen et al., 2011). Thus, both spontaneous and planned adaptation increasingly confront political questions of social equity and justice in sharing the burdens and benefits of adaptation, highlighting the need to reconsider adaptation as not merely an unavoidable response to environmental change but a set of individual and collective choices embedded within existing institutions and structures of development (Agrawal, 2008; O'Brien, 2012; Wangui et al., 2012). It follows that the realization of synergies between adaptation and development would not merely require steps toward piecemeal technical "climate-proofing" of development sectors (e.g., agriculture, health) within conventional development frameworks, but may require transitional and transformative forms of adaptation that address institutions, governance, and the broader set of discourses and ideologies of development (Pelling, 2011).

If adaptation is inherently political on multiple levels, its political dimensions and related questions of equity and justice may be concealed by the apolitical framings, simplifying discourses, and technocratic policies that we associate with an adaptation imperative. As finance becomes available for rapidly expanding adaptation activities by governments and non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) (e.g. Michaelowa, 2012), planned adaptation may take on characteristics of Ferguson's (1990) anti-politics machine. Following Ferguson (1990) and related critiques of development (e.g., Rist 1997), an anti-politics of adaptation would frame adaptation as consisting of expertly designed, neutral interventions to address urgent societal needs, namely the protection of a vulnerable population from the highly generalized threat of climate change. In constructing human-environmental geographies of adaptation, an anti-politics of adaptation would draw on the dominant narratives of the "apolitical ecologies" (Robbins, 2012) of eco-scarcity and modernization, wherein technocratic interventions targeting productivity and improved management of environmental resources are the primary means of avoiding environmental calamities. Just as Hart (2001) argues that intentional development has tended to obscure immanent processes of development and social change, technocratic planned adaptation may eclipse and even render less effective the adaptive practices and capacities of communities—what Wangui et al. (2012) have called spontaneous adaptation, following usage suggested by the IPCC (Field et al., 2014).

We argue that Tanzanian policy has created an anti-politics of adaptation by silencing the multiple institutional and political dimensions that hang in the balance in the identification and pursuit of adaptation priorities. Furthermore, we contend that the policy discourse of adaptation in Tanzania reflects convergence with the predominant neo-liberal approach to development policy, including the country's major agricultural policy initiative that promotes foreign agribusiness at the expense of addressing the complex and differentiated livelihood needs of pastoralists and small farmers.

We begin by contrasting definitions of transitional and transformative adaptation and identifying the potential for such framings to inform adaptation policy. The second section examines local environmental governance in Tanzania, with specific concern for the local institutional frameworks in which adaptation is to be pursued. We argue that local government in Tanzania bears the burden of a model of decentralization that gives local government heavy responsibilities but few resources to pursue locally sensitive development and to mediate questions of equity in the local context.

Tanzania's NAPA and National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS) are the foundation for Tanzania's national approach to climate change adaptation policy. We find parallel themes and priorities in the current national agricultural development initiative, *Kilimo Kwanza* and related development initiatives such as promotion of overseas direct investment by agribusiness in Tanzania's so-called Southern Corridor (SAGCOT, 2014). These themes and priorities are shown to be congruent with the overarching discourse of climate change adaptation in contemporary Tanzania which constructs climate change as a generalized threat to a homogenous, impoverished rural population.

In the penultimate section, we draw on the authors' field research in the Kilimanjaro region to examine recent changes in livelihood and resource access among farmers and pastoralists. The case study highlights the complex local institutional and resource tenure questions that are silenced by current adaptation policy but which must be incorporated into policy if synergies between adaptation and rural development aspirations are to be realized.

### Transitions and transformations in adaptation policy

Adaptation policy may draw on a range of framings of nature-society relations and more recent ways of understanding adaptation to climate variability and change (Head, 2010; Schipper,

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