



# Institutional challenges to climate change adaptation: A case study on policy action gaps in Uganda



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## ABSTRACT

Despite the considerable progress made in the last decade towards building governance systems for climate change adaptation in Africa, implementation still limits positive responses. This study applies an iterative process of field assessments and literature reviews across multiple governance levels and spatial scales to identify constraints to effective formulation and implementation of climate change related policies and strategies in Uganda. Data was collected through sex-segregated participatory vulnerability assessments with farming communities in Rakai district, policy document reviews, and interviews with policy actors at national and district levels. Findings reveal that the key challenges to effective policy implementation are diverse and cut across the policy development and implementation cycle. Policies are mainly developed by central government agencies; other actors are insufficiently involved while local communities are excluded. There is also a communication disconnect between national, district, and community levels. Coupled with limited technical capacity and finances, political interference, and absence of functional implementation structures across these levels, climate change adaptation becomes constrained. We propose strategies that enhance linkages between levels and actors, which will improve policy formulation, implementation and ultimately adaptation by smallholders.

## 1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that policies need to provide a supportive environment that not only guides development stakeholders in planning and executing adaptation interventions but also enables farming communities to adapt to climate change (Berman et al., 2015; Bauer et al., 2011; Cimato and Mullan, 2010; Hallegatte et al., 2011; Otieno et al., 2017; Urwin and Jordan, 2008; Zougmore et al., 2016).

With this realization, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was formed in 1992 to facilitate comprehensive national adaptation strategies. Least Developed Countries (LDCs) proceeded to develop National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA), which describe a country's perception of its most 'urgent and immediate needs to adapt to climate change' (UNFCCC, 2011:2). The LDCs are also developing National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) to address the medium and long-term climate change effects.

The Ugandan government signed and ratified the UNFCCC in 1992 and 1993 respectively and made the first national communication to

the UNFCCC in 2002, which laid the basis for the preparation of the NAPA that became operational in 2007. The NAPA is regarded as the first national 'policy' that was fully dedicated to climate change adaptation (Friis-Hansen et al., 2013; Hepworth, 2010). The NAPA prioritized nine adaptation projects: (i) community tree growing; (ii) land degradation management; (iii) strengthening meteorological services; (iv) community water and sanitation; (v) water for production; (vi) drought adaptation; (vii) vectors, pests and disease control; (viii) indigenous knowledge and natural resources management; and (ix) climate change and development planning (MWE, 2010). Although implementation of these projects has been criticized by some to be deficient (Friis-Hansen et al., 2013; GoU, 2010; Kissinger et al., 2013; Orindi, 2013), the NAPA process stimulated the nation to plan for adaptation. Following the NAPA, the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) was developed and approved in April 2015. The overall objective of the NCCP is "to ensure that all stakeholders address climate change impacts and their causes through appropriate measures, while promoting sustainable development and a green economy" (GoU,

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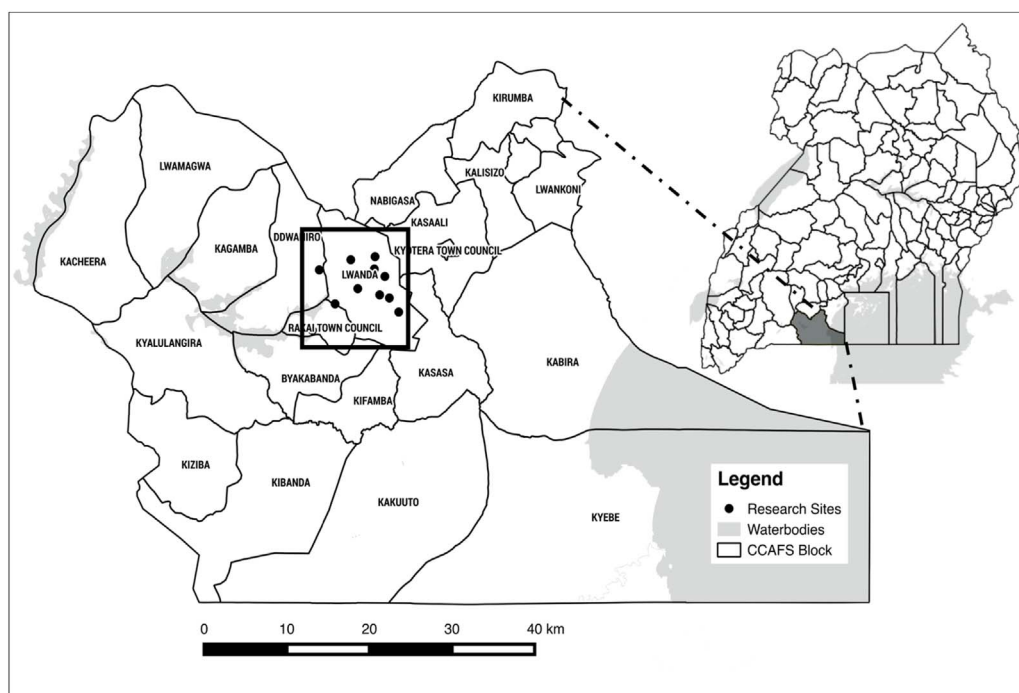


Fig. 1. Location of Rakai district – local level study site.

2015:13). The policy lays out guiding principles for its application, highlights adaptation and mitigation priorities and proposes the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks. It also defines roles of various actors and mechanisms for a coordinated climate change action in the country. Although the country does not yet have an over-arching NAP, an agricultural sector NAP has been developed, with the objective of increasing the sector's resilience to the impacts of climate change, through coordinated interventions that enhance sustainable agriculture, food and nutritional security, livelihood improvement and sustainable development. All these policies are aligned with Uganda's Vision 2040 (GoU, 2015), which acknowledges climate change as a challenge and lays down clear strategies for dealing with it, including development of policies and institutions; strengthening coordination systems at national and local levels; and capacity building of local governments and decision makers, among others.

Uganda has other policies that provide options for potential climate adaptation although they do not necessarily make explicit mention of climate change. These include the National Agriculture Policy 2013, the Uganda National Land Policy 2013, the National Environment Management Policy 1994, the Uganda Forestry Policy 2001, National Policy for the Conservation and Management of Wetland Resources 1995 and National Development Plans.

Despite considerable progress made in developing a governance system for climate change adaptation, findings from Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America indicate that implementation is often constrained by lack of harmonized sectoral planning (Madzwamuse, 2010; Mamouda, 2011; Pramova et al., 2015; Chesterman and Neely, 2015) and inconsistencies between national and local adaptation policies and strategies (Patt and Schroter, 2008; Stringer et al., 2009; Hisali et al., 2011). The few studies conducted on Uganda focused on the NAPA process (Fris-Hansen et al., 2013; Hepworth, 2010; Kissinger et al., 2013; Nyasimi et al., 2016; Orindi, 2013), which formulation approach was prescribed by the UNFCCC and might not be representative. In this paper, we identify constraints to effective implementation of Ugandan policies and strategies related to food security and climate change. Taking Rakai district as a case study, we analyze the smallholder vulnerability context of farming communities in a participatory manner, identify associated adaptation constraints for community-level actors, link policy formulation to the identified constraints, and suggest mechanisms that

can enable effective policy implementation to improve adaptation by the smallholder farmers.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology for this study includes an iterative process of field and desk studies across multiple governance levels. First, a situational analysis was conducted in Rakai between November and December 2012. This was followed up by an incremental review of national and district level policies from August 2013 to June 2014. Key informant interviews were conducted with sub-county, district and national level government officials between October 2014 and June 2015. Finally, the results were validated at district and national level through presentations and receiving feedback at stakeholder workshops and climate change platforms in 2015.

### 2.1. Vulnerability of livelihoods in Rakai: a situational analysis

Rakai district is characterized by intensive coffee-banana and mixed-crop farming systems. Coffee has been the traditional cash crop while bananas have constituted the main staple crop. Over the last 2–3 decades, farm sizes have decreased (Fermont et al., 2008; Seeley et al., 2010a) and yields have stagnated at levels well below attainable yields due to changes in rainfall patterns, persistent droughts, increased pests and diseases, declining soil fertility and agricultural labour shortages (Abera-Kalibata et al., 2008; Beuing, 2010; Taylor et al., 2011; Wairegi et al., 2010). In an effort to improve their agricultural output, farmers have started to diversify crops and adopt improved varieties of coffee, maize, cassava, beans and potatoes in effort to overcome drought and pest/disease outbreaks (Kizito et al., 2007; Kyazze and Kristjanson, 2011). There have also been shifts from cattle to small stock (goats, pigs, sheep and chicken) due to reduced pasture and water availability, as well as the ease of marketing and acquiring small stock and reduced investment risk and time, as compared to cattle. However, the proportions of farmers adapting positively are still low while the majority remains vulnerable to a wide range of constraints.

The farming system in Rakai is already experiencing climate change impacts from diverse climate change hazards (UNDP, 2013). Due to these impacts, Rakai was selected as one of the NAPA priority districts

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