



# Mainstreaming climate change adaptation into the European Union's development assistance

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of mainstreaming efforts regarding climate change adaptation (CCA) in EU development cooperation. By constructing and operationalising an analytical framework capable of tracing the level of mainstreaming throughout different phases of the policy cycle, we provide an answer to the question 'what works and what doesn't' in the integration of climate change in development cooperation. We combine a document analysis with semi-structured expert interviews, encompassing both HQ level in Brussels as well as EU aid activities in nine different developing countries. Our findings indicate that the Commission envisions a harmonisation approach towards CCA mainstreaming, targeting aid activities related to sustainable agriculture, food security and rural development. Although the toolbox for mainstreaming allows for a prioritisation of CCA, the procedural approach is currently ineffective due to limited staff and mainstreaming fatigue. In contrast, the growing political salience of CCA mainstreaming can be considered the main driver of mainstreaming efforts in the Commission.

## 1. Introduction

Aid donors increasingly perceive climate change adaptation (CCA) and development cooperation as a two-way street: CCA demands 'climate proofing' of development activities to ensure their sustainability, while aid can also strengthen partner countries' resilience to climate change (Gupta, 2009). As a leading international donor, also the European Union (EU) has acknowledged the need to 'mainstream' climate change into its bilateral aid policies in its guiding documents on international cooperation (European Commission, 2006, 2011, 2017).

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of CCA mainstreaming within EU development cooperation for the current policy cycle (2014–2020). For this purpose we operationalise an analytical framework that traces the level of mainstreaming in different policy phases. Despite the growing literature on environmental policy integration (EPI) and climate policy integration (CPI) (Lafferty & Hovden 2003; Adelle & Russel 2013), empirical evidence regarding their implementation and influencing factors remains scarce (Persson et al. this issue). There is thus a need for taking stock of what is already being done under the banner of EPI, by evaluating its performance in different contexts. Such efforts can lead us to generalizable knowledge on effective EPI strategies (ibid.; Nilsson & Persson 2017). Second, we aim to contribute to the EU foreign policy literature. Despite the EU's image as the world's largest development donor and international

climate leader, the inclusion of climate concerns in EU external relations is still largely uncharted territory (notwithstanding notable exceptions: Peskett et al., 2009; Gupta & van der Grijp 2010).

We will start by constructing an analytical framework that distinguishes between four phases of the policy cycle: agenda-setting, the policy process, policy output phase and implementation. Within every phase, we will further differentiate between three 'levels' of mainstreaming: coordination, harmonisation and prioritisation. This allows examining how and to what extent the cross-cutting issue of CCA mainstreaming is being translated from a general policy commitment to a concrete issue in EU development projects.

In analysing the policy cycle, we first examine how CCA is represented in some of the main EU development policy documents. Subsequently, we provide an overview of the mainstreaming 'toolbox' designed by Commission agencies, being the Directorate-Generals for Development Cooperation (DEVCO) and Climate Action (CLIMA). This is combined with an inquiry into mainstreaming within EU aid activities in nine developing countries: Ghana, Niger, Malawi, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Zambia, Uganda and Chad. We identify typical cases for the sake of generating a representative image of mainstreaming efforts. For every country, an analysis is made of the programming and implementation documents of EU aid: National Indicative Programmes (NIPs) and Annual Action Programmes (AAPs). In addition, 12 semi-structured expert interviews with EU officials were

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conducted, both at headquarter level in Brussels as well as within EU delegations<sup>1</sup> in all selected countries.

Our analysis is followed by a discussion linking back to the broader EPI/CPI literature, followed by a number of policy-relevant recommendations. We conclude by providing some potential paths for further research.

## 2. Analytical framework

Literature on mainstreaming climate change in development has expanded in recent years (cf. Klein et al., 2007; Lauer and Eguavoen 2016). Overall, existing work strongly focuses on incorporating climate adaptation in development cooperation. Whereas mitigation measures are mostly confined to specific sectoral aid activities like energy infrastructure, adaptation relates to reducing the vulnerability to adverse climate change impacts, implying a broad spectrum of affected sectors and policy responses (Huq and Reid 2004). Thus, linkages between CCA and activities of donors are plentiful and development cooperation has a distinct role to play in increasing the adaptive capacity of societies within the Global South, targeting the underlying drivers of climate vulnerability (Klein et al. 2007).

Existing literature can be situated in the broader body of work on environmental policy integration (EPI) and climate policy integration (CPI). EPI is considered to be an indispensable part of sustainable development, and is generally defined as the act of “incorporating environmental concerns in sectoral policies outside the traditional environmental policy domain” (Runhaar, Driessen & Uittenbroek 2014, p. 233). This paper will focus on CPI, which emerged as a specific form of EPI because of the growing international attention towards climate change (Adelle and Russel 2013).

The literature is less straightforward on conceptual delineations of the terms ‘integration’ and ‘mainstreaming’. Some ascribe the difference in terminology to merely differences in context. Yamin (cited in Adelle and Russel 2013, p. 3) argues that the term ‘climate mainstreaming’ simply resonates more within development studies, as it lines up with other topics like mainstreaming gender and disaster risk reduction. In contrast, Gupta (2010: p. 79) does make a conceptual distinction, arguing that mainstreaming implies climate change “becoming the overriding objective” and that there is a proactive engagement with the issue. In contrast, “integration” according to her refers to a more reactive approach, in which climate change is being taken into account as an “add-on, end of pipe solution”. This links back to a similar typology within the EPI literature: according to Lafferty and Hovden (2003), EPI can be separated from conventional notions of policy integration, because EPI ideally implies environmental objectives to be given ‘principled priority’, thus installing environmental objectives as overarching priorities in other policy domains (ibid.). In sum, the typologies of both Gupta and Lafferty & Hovden differentiate between ‘weak’ policy integration – a reactive, add-on approach to integrating CCA in development – and principled priority or mainstreaming – when CCA becomes the overriding objective in development cooperation.

More specifically, we will distinguish between four levels of policy integration: no integration, coordination (removing contradictions between policies), harmonisation (realising synergies between policies), and prioritisation (favouring CCA-related objectives) (Lafferty and Hovden 2003; Persson, Persson et al. this issue). While ‘coordination’ and harmonisation’ can be placed under the banner of ‘weak’ policy integration, ‘prioritisation’ implies that CCA becomes pivotal in aid activities.

Within this paper, we aim to provide a comprehensive oversight of CCA mainstreaming efforts within EU development cooperation, by tracing it through various phases of the policy cycle. Already in 2006,

the European Court of Auditors hinted at an implementation gap regarding climate mainstreaming in EU aid activities (ECA, 2006). This is a recurring observation within the existing literature: despite growing attention for climate change within the development community, mainstreaming commitments often do not result in adequate changes in policy practices (cf. Lauer and Eguavoen 2016). Somewhere along the line, the normative mainstreaming commitment thus becomes diluted and fails to materialise in development projects. However, no efforts have been undertaken to look into the persistence of this implementation gap within EU aid activities over the years. This study wants to fill the void by looking at mainstreaming efforts within the current aid cycle (2014–2020).

Such an inquiry also creates added value within the broader EPI/CPI literature. As Persson et al. argue in this special issue, research increasingly moves beyond conceptual studies into the empirical realm, by taking stock of what is being done under the EPI/CPI banner and to answer the question “what works where, when and how?” (Persson et al. this issue). Answering this question requires a detailed knowledge of the initial normative commitment to mainstreaming, the institutional setup, the available policy tools and their usage among policy makers. Thus, tracing mainstreaming efforts throughout the policy cycle is the best approach to find out what can be considered ‘effective’ policy interventions and to identify possible glitches in this regard.

We will focus on four different phases of the policy cycle (based on Persson, Persson et al. this issue):

1. Agenda-setting: to what extent is the initial need for mainstreaming articulated?
2. Policy process: what are the administrative routines and procedures available to facilitate mainstreaming?
3. Policy output: to what extent are CCA-objectives included in broad policy frameworks?
4. Policy implementation: To what extent are CCA-objectives included in the project design?

Thus, linking our policy cycle-based approach to our distinction between four ‘levels’ of CCA mainstreaming, our analytical framework allows us to track the level of CCA mainstreaming in each of the four phases of the policy cycle (Table 1).

Of course, mainstreaming CCA in other policy domains is a complex endeavor and is bound to face difficulties. According to Uittenbroek et al. (2013), the mainstreaming process should be perceived as fundamentally dynamic, with its scope being constantly reconsidered due to new opportunities and/or barriers. Examples of such influencing factors are the availability of information and financial resources, the organisational and institutional setup for mainstreaming, and social and cultural differences resulting from differences in worldviews between groups (Adger et al. cited in Uittenbroek et al., 2013; Moser and Ekstrom, 2010). After tracking CCA mainstreaming in the different policy phases, we will discuss the influence of such factors on overall CCA mainstreaming (cf. ‘Discussion and policy relevance’).

## 3. Methods and operationalisation

First of all, we will operationalise the level of CCA mainstreaming by examining its framing in different stages of the policy cycle. Coordination will be operationalised as representing mainstreaming as an add-on component in aid activities. Put simply, CCA could just be incidentally mentioned in EU policy documents, without considering its influence on development activities. At best, coordination implies mainstreaming CCA in terms of end-of-pipe solutions, focused at mitigating the potentially negative impact of aid activities (Runhaar, Driessen & Soer 2009). Harmonisation implies that CCA is on equal terms with development activities in different phases of the policy cycle. Thus, mainstreaming would be framed as the need to find synergies between both. In the policy output- and implementation phase,

<sup>1</sup> EU delegations are the main implementing agencies for development cooperation in partner countries.

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