SUSTAINABILITY: A MISSING DIMENSION IN CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION DISCOURSE IN AFRICA?

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WHAT IS THE PROBLEM

• The linkages between adaptation and sustainability

• Because adaptation processes can potentially exacerbate inequalities in well-being by creating winners and losers (Kates, 2000) or one “group’s adaptations can be another’s’ hazard” (p16)

• Adaptation even if benefiting some interests, can at the same time adversely affect vulnerable groups and create social inequity, as well as unintentionally undermine environmental integrity (Barnett and O’Neill, 2010).

• Yet little attention has been paid to the consequences of adaptation policies and practices for sustainability (Eriksen et al., 2011)

• Therefore, there is need to strengthen the growing conviction that climate change and sustainability issues cannot be treated in isolation
STUDY APPROACH

• Based on critical reflection of cases from sub Saharan Africa
• Underpinned by the Sustainable Adaptation Framework, adapted from Eriksen et.al, 2011.
• Understand how sustainability is seen to advance the adaptation agenda in Africa
• Interrogate whether sustainability has simply become a platform for people concerned about climate change to voice their views on adaptation or whether there is indeed some value to calls to put a greater emphasis on sustainability within climate change adaptation processes.
• Assess whether sustainability indeed represents a ‘new opening’ to address problems emerging from adaptation processes in an innovative way
• Look at options for reshuffling current understanding to ensure that sustainable adaptation indeed involves reducing vulnerability, fostering equity and promoting environmental integrity
• Explicate on the notion of climate-smart agriculture as one way to reconcile climate change mitigation, adaptation and development agendas in Africa
KEY FINDINGS

• Climate adaptation community has made significant strides towards pushing the boundaries of research and analysis.
• Significant contributions on viable adaptation measures and strategies in Africa; opportunities for and barriers to adaptation; the politics of and institutional dynamics in adaptation planning.
• However, the literature on adaptation in Africa visibly shows ‘sustainability deficit’
• The literature remains sparse, unfocused, and fragmented.
• From a conceptual standpoint, adaptation and sustainability regarded as separate.
• Climate change adaptation has been predominantly defined outside of the broader discourse on sustainable development.
• Effectively bypassing the complex, context-specific and multidimensional challenges of sustainable development (Eriksen et al., 2010).
KEY FINDINGS

- Holistic recognition of the vulnerability context and acknowledging of the effects of different values and interests on adaptation outcomes is evident (see Osman-Elasha et al., 2006)’s work on adaptation practices and policies in Sudan, and Berman and colleagues’ (2015) work in Uganda.

- But some works do not more directly address sustainability issues vis-à-vis livelihoods adaptation and institutions – leaving different analytical ends around environmental integrity, social justice and equity loose (see Osbahr et al., 2008).

- Other scholars simply choose to focus solely on infrastructural and technical options in their analysis of climate change adaptation in different African communities (see Calzadilla et al., 2014; Eguavoen and McCartney, 2013; Cooper et al., 2008), without raising any implications for sustainability.

- Whilst scholars question the sustainability of certain livelihood and adaptive strategies, they do not ground their analyses on a clear sustainability framework and/or principles (see in Zimbabwe, Gwimbi and Mundonga 2010, Mavhura et al., 2013, Murendo et al., 2012, Mutekwa 2009).

- The consequence is a loose coalition of studies that do not contribute systematically to addressing the ‘sustainability deficit’ in climate adaptation discourse.

- Use of SLF is also evident (see Mutami and Chazovachii 2012) in Zimbabwe and Paavola (2004) in Tanzania.

- However, most studies are somehow narrowly conceptualized as they over-emphasize contextual factors and stressors than other principles of sustainability.

- Indeed, adopting a narrow focus can lead to unintended or maladaptive consequences (Sterner et al., 2006).

- Also persuasive efforts on adaptive capacity (see Gbetibouo et al., 2010) in SA, Bryan et al. (2009) in Ethiopia, Unganai & Murwira (2010), Mutasa 2011 in Zimbabwe) but they largely miss the complex dynamics of sustainability.

- Resultantly, adaptation is often operationalized in practice through changes in technology, institutions and managerial systems (Klein et al., 2007).
CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

• Departure from traditional sustainable livelihoods approaches to new and broader resiliency framings

• Consider climate adaptation within the context of multiple stressors and vulnerabilities, and with concern for intra- and intergenerational equity, environmental integrity and poverty eradication.

• Expand the knowledge base on climate-smart agriculture and emphasize its ability to advance the sustainability agenda
CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

• It is important in view of the predominantly agro-based economies that characterize most countries in Africa.
• Increases productivity and resilience, reduces greenhouse gases (GHGs) and enhances the achievement of national food security and development goals (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2010).
• Reconciles adaptation, mitigation and sustainable development goals under one banner
• Examples include conservation agriculture, agroforestry, improved livestock and water management, and ecosystems approaches to fisheries and aquaculture.
• What is needed is to document and bring together cases and lessons, systematically capture synergies amongst the aforementioned dimensions in different contexts and at different scales.
• The concept still needs critical evaluation as the relationship between the three dimensions remains poorly understood such that practically any improved agricultural practice can be considered climate-smart (Neufeldt et. al, 2013)