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Africa, sustainable development and climate change

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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 indeedinvolves 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 ove-remphasize 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)