

Climate change responses in Zimbabwe: local actions and national policy

Climate variability and change pose a significant threat to sustainable development and poverty reduction in Zimbabwe. The country is particularly vulnerable due to endemic poverty, limited coping capacity and a highly variable climate. This briefing paper draws on the experiences and insights of civil society organisations working on climate change in Zimbabwe (as coordinated through the Civil Society Climate Change Working Group) to examine local and national responses to climate change, with a particular focus on how these respond to the needs of the most vulnerable rural and urban populations. The briefing concludes with a set of recommendations aimed specifically at development practitioners and policymakers interested in supporting more effective adaptation activities that reflect the needs and priorities of vulnerable individuals, households and communities. These call for greater involvement of civil society in developing national policy, and a stronger focus on urban vulnerability.

Policy pointers

- **Zimbabwe must prepare for climate change** — and this preparation needs to take into account the needs of its growing urban population.
- **National strategies are an important element of responding to climate change**, and these can be strengthened significantly by greater public participation and by drawing on the experiences of existing adaptation activities.
- **Recognising and learning from strategies adopted by other highly vulnerable countries** (including Least Developed Countries) is an approach that can offer significant advantages to Zimbabwe.

Climate change is a principal development challenge for Zimbabwe

Meteorological records demonstrate that Zimbabwe is already experiencing climate changes — as more variable rainfall, and more frequent and intense extreme weather events (including droughts, floods and tropical storms). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projections for sub-Saharan Africa¹ suggest increased water stress, decreased yields from rain-fed agriculture, increased food insecurity and malnutrition, and the spread of arid and semi-arid land are all likely. These changing environmental conditions are expected to adversely affect several sectors in Zimbabwe including agriculture, water and health; and to reshape the context for infrastructure and energy provision, human settlements and gender-related development. Taken as a whole, climate change

significantly challenges Zimbabwe's ability to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Although large regions of sub-Saharan Africa will be affected by this climate variability and change, Zimbabwe is particularly vulnerable due to its heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture and climate-sensitive resources.² Climate change-induced water stress is likely to intensify the existing problems of declining agricultural outputs, decreasing economic productivity, poverty and food insecurity. This will affect farmers directly, but will also have severe effects on food availability and pricing for a growing urban population. Consequently, climate change poses a major threat to sustainable development at the micro and macro levels.

The analysis and conclusions in this policy brief draw on a series of background research papers and ongoing discussions with civil society organisations conducted as part of an IIED project on information and advocacy for climate change adaptation in Zimbabwe.³

More attention should be paid to the multi-level nature of policy and programming

Ignoring urbanisation risks missed opportunities and unmet challenges

Zimbabwe's current policies and development practices, including those seeking climate change adaptation, are heavily influenced by a strong 'rural bias'. Many policymakers and researchers ignore longstanding urbanisation trends and continue to overstate the proportion of Zimbabwe's population living in rural areas.

Although some nations in Southern Africa are now urbanising considerably faster than Zimbabwe (for example, Malawi's urbanisation rate is above 4 per cent per year), the country has been steadily urbanising since 1950 at roughly 2–4 per cent per decade (see Table 1).

Sustained urban population growth (both from rural-urban migration and from natural increase within urban centres) has contributed to relatively high levels of urbanisation, estimates of which range from 38 per cent, based on UN statistics,⁴ to more than 50 per cent based on national experts' assessments.⁵ Even if the lower statistic is used, Zimbabwe's urban transition is already more advanced than many other countries in Southern Africa, including Malawi (15.7 per cent urban), Tanzania (26.7 per cent urban), Lesotho (27.6 per cent urban), Mozambique (31.2 per cent urban) and Madagascar (32.6 per cent urban). The higher assessments suggest there is a risk that Zimbabwe

is prioritising rural development issues (which, of course, remain highly important) without recognising the specific nature and growing scale of urban marginalisation and vulnerability.

This narrative of 'rural bias' reflects a prevailing attitude among many African governments that urbanisation is a problem to be avoided through effective rural climate and development policy.⁶ Yet this strategy is ultimately counterproductive, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Rapid urbanisation — which is already happening — continues to concentrate both the opportunities and challenges of sustainable development in cities.⁷ Opportunities will be lost, and challenges will remain unmet, if policy responses to climate change fail to take account of urbanisation.

Local responses from civil society

Nevertheless, within Zimbabwe's focus on rural development, a wide range of stakeholders have recognised the threat posed by climate change, and have begun to respond — at least by addressing agricultural vulnerability. Climate change is also prompting a growing number of NGOs and research organisations, including UN agencies, to build strong adaptation⁸ components into new development projects, particularly in drought-prone rural areas.

Community-based adaptation to climate change⁹ is one such approach, and is increasingly widely adopted in Zimbabwe. It recognises that climate change impacts will fall hardest on those who are least able to cope, that responses will require local adaptation planning and a greater focus on building adaptive capacity, and that individuals and communities already have a strong reservoir of skills and knowledge that could increase their resilience.

The vast majority of Zimbabwe's community-based adaptation projects target smallholder farmers in rural areas. A particularly good example, the Coping with Drought and Climate Change in Chiredzi District project, demonstrates how community-based adaptation can empower local farmers, ensuring they actively participate in developing culturally sensitive and locally appropriate adaptation strategies for future climatic changes (see Coping with drought and climate change in Chiredzi District).

Such lessons are particularly relevant in Zimbabwe where local context, indigenous knowledge and cultural norms are among the most important factors for ensuring that community-based adaptation is effective.

Public participation

Around the world, civil society is playing an increasingly important role in raising awareness on climate change, and in using advocacy to help ensure

Table 1. Urbanisation in Zimbabwe, 1950 to 2010.

Year	Level of urbanisation
1950	10.6%
1955	11.6%
1960	12.6%
1965	14.6%
1970	17.4%
1975	19.9%
1980	22.4%
1985	25.4%
1990	29.0%
1995	31.7%
2000	33.8%
2005	35.9%
2010	38.1%

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2012. *World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2011 Revision, CD-ROM Edition*.

lessons from local adaptation activities reach national-level policies.¹¹

Civil society can build effective communication channels for meaningful public participation. Most participation in Zimbabwe is supported at the local level by NGOs engaged in community-based projects. These projects largely use participation as a way to ensure that local strategies are working in local contexts.

But civil society can also use advocacy to support meaningful participation by vulnerable groups, including the rural and urban poor, in the discussions that determine policy and investment priorities. At present these groups have little representation in higher-level decision-making processes and planning procedures in Zimbabwe. Civil society can support individuals and households in making meaningful local changes, can demonstrate the potential of communities to tackle issues that shape their lives, and can bring vulnerable groups' priorities to the policymaking process. Such efforts to close the longstanding gap between vulnerable groups and policymakers and planners are highly relevant in Zimbabwe, where the gap has been particularly wide.

National approaches that 'join up' existing experience

Many African countries, including Zimbabwe, are beginning to develop national frameworks for responding to climate change, intended to guide adaptation projects and programmes. Many of these support projects that help civil society participate in identifying adaptation priorities and defining adaptation actions, thus drawing on valuable local knowledge. Zimbabwe has considerable experience of community-based adaptation — for example as described for Chiredzi District. But as yet many of the adaptation activities NGOs and international organisations undertake have been uncoordinated, leading to challenges in targeting the most appropriate beneficiaries and to duplication of roles.¹²

But positive signs of progress are emerging, as exemplified by the growing number of NGOs involved in Zimbabwe's Climate Change Working Group. Networks of this type can support 'joined-up' action on climate change. For example, the Chiredzi District project demonstrates how national government is beginning to work in partnership with civil society to translate local learning into higher-level policy.

Many countries in Southern Africa with similar socioeconomic and vulnerability profiles to Zimbabwe are categorised as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) — a UN classification denoting low levels of socioeconomic development. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has supported LDCs to undertake dedicated national climate change policy frameworks, called National Adaptation

Coping with drought and climate change in Chiredzi District¹⁰

This five-year pilot project (2007–12), led by the Government of Zimbabwe, the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environmental Facility, used a community-based adaptation approach to assess vulnerability and to develop priority adaptation strategies for smallholder farmers and pastoralists in Chiredzi District. The focus was on food security and sustainable natural resources management. The project followed a five step approach:

1. Assessing current and future climate risks and identifying those that the smallholder farmers considered most important.
2. Assessing the vulnerability of people's livelihood systems.
3. Identifying and assessing vulnerable communities (finding 'hotspots').
4. Discussions with the community to identify priority adaptation strategies.
5. Implementing pilot projects in 'hotspots'.

Importantly, this pilot project was a partnership between national government and civil society that aimed to up-scale local adaptation lessons towards national-level policy. This 'linked-up' policy approach is relatively new in Zimbabwe and could greatly help the country develop its dedicated national climate change framework.

Programmes of Action (or NAPAs),¹³ and the LDC Work Programme supports technical assistance, capacity building and information/technology exchange activities to help develop national climate change frameworks. Although Zimbabwe is not officially an LDC, many of these activities are clearly relevant to the country, and there is the potential for these approaches to be adopted in policies and programmes that are being developed.

Recommendations

As Zimbabwe continues to develop its climate change framework, more attention should be paid to the multi-level nature of adaptation policy and programming. This will help ensure that policy and investment decisions reflect the needs of the most vulnerable.¹⁴

The project upon which this briefing is based developed a number of recommendations for supporting more effective adaptation policy and planning in Zimbabwe, and these are presented below. These recommendations address climate trends and projections and both urban and rural vulnerability. Importantly, they also reflect the lessons learnt from a variety of case studies on local adaptation projects with valuable implications for development practice and national policy.

Recommendations for adaptation projects and programmes:

- Use more community-based adaptation projects — these can empower communities not only to strengthen their adaptive capacity and make

adaptation interventions more effective, but also to influence policy-making at all levels.

- Improve how community-based adaptation and other development projects use information on climate trends and changes — this can help ensure that development benefits are not lost to climate change.
- Use participatory techniques to assess vulnerability and adaptation at-scale and across a variety of sectors in both rural and urban areas, and share the results openly — this can foster cross-scale learning between the public, government and civil society.

Recommendations for adaptation policymaking and climate governance:

- Learn from the strategies employed by other highly vulnerable countries (including the Least Developed Countries) in planning for adaptation.
- Explore how new adaptation funds (for example, the UNFCCC Adaptation Fund) might support innovative projects and programmes, including capacity development; and develop mechanisms that strengthen donors' confidence that funds will be used effectively to benefit vulnerable groups.
- Re-assess the specific aspects of vulnerability that affect both rural and urban populations to ensure that adaptation programming meets the needs of the most vulnerable groups in different locations.
- Develop policy frameworks that recognise differentiated and complementary urban and rural development and adaptation policies.

- Actively seek out and include marginalised groups in more participatory and inclusive decision-making processes and planning procedures to ensure that future climate policy responds to the vulnerabilities of both women and men living in climate sensitive regions of Zimbabwe, whether in rural or urban areas.
- Develop mechanisms for sharing information and collaborating with different actors, including civil society, the private sector, and government at all levels.

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This briefing paper draws on discussions with researchers and civil society organisations associated with the Zimbabwe Civil Society Working Group on Climate Change. The authors would particularly like to thank the following: Rabbecca Rance Chanakira, Kudzai Chatiza, Mutuso Dhlwayo, Medicine Masiwa, Davison Muchadenyika and Prisca Mugabe.



The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an independent, nonprofit research institute working in the field of sustainable development. IIED provides expertise and leadership in researching and achieving sustainable development at local, national, regional and global levels.

This research was funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government.

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Notes

- ¹ For an overview of the projected impacts of climate change in Africa see chapter 9 of the IPCC 2007 Fourth Assessment Report. Available at: www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar4-wg2-chapter9.pdf
- ² For an examination of Africa's vulnerability to climate variability and change see section 4.1 in: UNFCCC. 2007. *Impacts, Vulnerabilities and Adaptation in Developing Countries*. Available at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/impacts.pdf>
- ³ Brown, D. et al. 2012. *Climate impacts, vulnerability and adaptation in Zimbabwe*. Climate Change Working Paper. IIED, London. See: <http://pubs.iied.org/10034IIED>
- ⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2012. *World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2011 Revision*. CD-ROM Edition.
- ⁵ Chatiza, K., Dhlwayo, M., Muchadenyika, D. Forthcoming. *Cities, infrastructure and climate change in Zimbabwe*. Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN-ODI).
- ⁶ Pieterse, E. 2010. Filling the void: towards an agenda for action on African urbanization. In: E. Pieterse (ed.). *Urbanization imperatives for Africa: Transcending policy inertia*. pp. 7–27. African Centre for Cities, South Africa.
- ⁷ Satterthwaite, D. et al. 2007. Adapting to climate change in urban areas: the possibilities and constraints in low- and middle-income nations. In: Bicknell, J., Dodman, D., Satterthwaite, D. (eds). *Adapting cities to climate change: Understanding and addressing the development challenges*. pp. 201–218. Earthscan Publications, London.
- ⁸ The UNFCCC defines adaptation as the process through which societies increase their ability to cope with an uncertain future, which involves taking appropriate action and making the adjustments and changes to reduce the negative impacts of climate change.
- ⁹ See Huq, S., Ayers, J. 2007. *Community-based adaptation: A vital approach to the threat climate change poses to the poor*. IIED briefing. IIED, London. See: <http://pubs.iied.org/17005IIED>.
- ¹⁰ GoZ-UNDP/GEF. 2009. *Coping with Drought: Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change. A focus on Chiredzi District, Zimbabwe*. Environmental Management Agency, Harare.
- ¹¹ Reid, H. et al. 2012. *Southern voices on climate policy choices: analysis of and lessons learned from civil society advocacy on climate change*. IIED, London.
- ¹² Chagutah, T. 2010. *Climate change vulnerability and preparedness in Southern Africa: Zimbabwe country report*. Heinrich Boell Stiftung, Cape Town. See: www.za.boell.org/downloads/hbf_web_zim_21_2.pdf
- ¹³ NAPAs are national climate change frameworks dedicated to identifying and prioritising critically important adaptation activities for which further delay might increase vulnerability or lead to higher adaptation costs over the long term.
- ¹⁴ Dodman, D., Mitlin, D. 2011. Challenges for community-based adaptation: discovering the potential for transformation. *Journal of International Development*. doi: 10.1002/jid.1772.