

Pursuing Climate Resilient Development in Namibia: Key issues for policy

A climate resilient development pathway (CRDP) is ‘**a development pathway that actively and deliberately chooses policies and practices that strengthen mitigation and adaptation outcomes and that enables an equitable, just, and sustainable development.**’ Identifying suitable and effective CRDPs therefore requires integration between the goals of responding to climate change and responding to the development needs of present and future generations. This summary presents highlights from our research reviewing the issues and prospects for achieving CRDPs in Namibia, based on review of existing research outputs, analysis of key national policy objectives and survey/interview consultations with a panel of experts. It is part of a wider study on CRDPs in three countries that have extensive arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs): Namibia, Kenya and India.

The Climate Change Context in Namibia

Even a relatively modest increase of 1.5°C in global temperature could have a significant impact on Namibia’s agriculture based-economy. The 1.5°C threshold could be breached within the next decade, and the 2°C threshold the decade thereafter. Temperature increases will result in significant increases in extremely hot days and nights, and more frequent and intense heat waves. The total annual rainfall is expected to decrease, further driving water scarcity. Yet, the amount of rain falling within heavy rainfall events, and particularly extremely heavy rainfall events, will likely increase. This means there is an urgent need to accelerate Namibia’s adaptation responses, as well as its mitigation plans.

The National Climate Change Policy (NCCC) (2010) provides the legal framework and overarching national strategy for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate change mitigation and adaptation activities in Namibia. Considered a hotspot of vulnerability to climate change, the country has developed adaptation programmes focused particularly on key climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, tourism and fisheries. Namibia has also updated its emission reduction goal to 91% by 2030 and the country is committed to introduce new emissions-reducing technologies and practices.

However, climate change adaptation and mitigation cannot proceed in a vacuum: neither their benefits nor their progress can be realized without taking into account other development challenges and dynamics. Equally, Namibia’s Vision 2030, a strategic approach for long-term sustainable development, acknowledges that climate change impacts directly the entire chain of national development and is likely to have negative impacts on efforts to achieve development objectives. From our research in Namibia and across ASALs, we conclude that climate-resilient development implies an approach to development that has three key interlinked ‘imperatives’. Here we summarize information on each of those three imperatives, highlighting issues for policy strengthening in Namibia.

Tackling Inequalities

Social inequalities including gender inequality have deep, historical roots, but addressing them should be central to CRDP efforts if these are to decrease vulnerability and bring about broad-based strengthening of societal resilience.

- Chronic poverty, marginalization and gender inequality constrain adaptive capacity for a large proportion of the rural population of Namibia. Lacking alternatives for livelihood diversification, many rural communities remain sensitive to climate variability and food insecurity: crops and livestock in these semi-arid conditions are susceptible to water stress, disease and heat stress.
- Namibia’s national policy objectives echo the importance of equity and justice issues. Key policies in, for example, disaster management, water and sanitation, and economic development, refer to targeting the most vulnerable, those with least access and those who are currently less prosperous. However, what remains key is to ensure that those targets are translated into appropriate actions on the ground, and that interventions take full account of differentiated needs.
- For example, in a study in north-central Namibia, the introduction of community-based water management was found to have effectively excluded some poorer and more marginalized households from accessing improved water supplies. Unable to afford user fees for collecting

from communal water points, such households often had little choice but to revert to hand-dug wells and other poorer quality water sources. More attention needs to be paid to ensuring that measures such as this are genuinely accessible to all.

Avoiding unsustainable outcomes

A long-term integrated view on climate risk management must be taken in order to sustainably build adaptive actions and adaptive capacities at different scales that take account of trade-offs between development paths and avoid lock-in to unsustainable or inequitable practices.

- Compatibility between sectoral objectives and the need for long-term sustainability is expressed across most of Namibia's key policy documents, although some of those focused on economic development and opportunity do not yet make explicit reference to climate change. It is important to ensure that this long-term perspective becomes built into interventions to manage climate risks in order to avoid short-term solutions that could be harmful in the long-run.
- For example, some sources argue that the current support mechanism for drought relief in Namibia may be creating a culture of dependence, undermining the potential for building resilient communities. That certainly does not imply abandoning emergency relief during crises. But it does call for consideration of how drought relief integrates with and supports longer-term adaptation to increasing water scarcity, as reflected in the goals of disaster management policy.
- Key lessons in long-term, integrated planning for water scarcity have been derived by the city of Windhoek through implementing water conservation measures including wastewater reclamation. The need for such action will be ever more pressing in the face of rural-urban migration, associated with the increasing pressures facing crop and livestock farmers.

Strengthening of capacities

The strengthening of capacities at all levels is especially important if society is to be able to make the types of inter-linked innovations that responding to climate change and development challenges entails. Capacity rests on strengthening skills, resources and decision-making structures.

- The importance of capacity strengthening for climate resilience is broadly recognised in Namibia's policy documents, but other sources suggest that impediments remain in mechanisms to achieve this at scale. For example, decentralization of climate change adaptation in Namibia has the advantage of bringing decision-making closer to local contexts, but requires not only skills development in integrated climate risk management but also the mechanisms and authority to coordinate adaptation activity across sectoral departments.
- In the context of growing water stress in the country, it has been argued that technical/capacity deficits and lack of sufficient budget constrains effective implementation of local water management, and that greater commitment is required to engage constructively with community leaders in water management and climate smart agricultural practices.
- Mainstreaming climate resilience information through a hybrid system that integrates scientific and traditional knowledge practices can build trust and help communities to be better equipped to adopt. Community leaders can play a key role in sharing information via local radio channels on climate risks and ideas for local actions that take into consideration local realities and beliefs.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The name of the project is 'Climate Resilient Development Pathways for Semi-Arid Regions of Africa and Asia (CRDP-SAR)', part of 'Building on CARIIA learning on women entrepreneurs, migration and climate-resilience development'. Project grant number: 109223-003

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was carried out with financial support from the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada.

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