STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

THE STATE OF AFRICAN FORESTS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE: CLIMATE FINANCE OR SIMPLE POLITICAL WILL?

Author:

Keamou Marcel Soropogui

School of Transnational Governance

ISSUE 2023/22
JULY 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year, the African Union (AU) and its member states go to the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP) with strong positions on climate justice to remind developed countries to honour their pledges on climate finance. However, apart from the lack of climate financing, there are many other challenges such as poor governance, institutional weaknesses and corruption that African nations face to better cope with climate change. This policy brief argues that these limitations, rather than sufficient availability of climate funding, are at the root of Africa's problems facing climate change. With their vast forests and water resources, African countries could offer their people better quality of life, with or without external aid. Focusing on the forestry sector, this policy brief identifies five key challenges to address in order to ensure sustainable management of Africa's forests and improve the living conditions of its population: 1) harmonisation of national and regional forest policies; 2) incorporation of stronger anti-corruption measures in these forest policies; 3) establishment of robust communication systems at the regional level to strengthen the implementation of forest policies; 4) setting up strong institutional structures to define ambitious and integrated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and translate them into tangible investment programmes and project pipelines; and 5) identification and resolution of problems that prevent climate financing from really making a difference on the ground. The forestry sector alone has the potential to allow Sub-Saharan Africans to adapt and mitigate climate change.

Author:

Keamou Marcel Soropogui | Manager at Etablissement Germaine Loua et Fils, Conakry, Republic of Guinea, Young African Leader Fellows (2022-2023), School of Transnational Governance, EUI

1. INTRODUCTION

Every year since the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris in 2015, the African Union (AU) and its member states attend the annual COP meetings with a firm stance on climate justice to remind developed countries to honour their commitments on climate financing. At the last Conference of the Parties (COP27) last year in Charm el-Sheikh, Egypt, calls for climate justice arose again. According to the Climate Policy Initiative (CIP), Africa will need $277 billion a year to implement its nationally determined contributions to the 2030 climate goal under the Paris Agreement.[1] However, apart from the lack of climate financing, there are many other challenges such as poor governance, institutional weaknesses and corruption that prevent African nations from better coping with climate change. This policy brief argues that these challenges, rather than the lack of funding, are at the root of Africa's problems facing climate change. With Africa's vast forests and water resources, much could be achieved with very little aid.

Sustainable management of forests and water resources remains a major opportunity for Africa to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change. The forestry sector (especially in forest areas crossing national borders) offers Africa enormous potential resilience to climate change. Forest ecosystems contribute to the maintenance and regulation of waterways, slow droughts and protect coastal communities from extreme weather events (including sea level rises). They also provide neighbouring communities with multiple services (energy, wood, timber and non-forestry products that help improve food security, health and household income).[2] Since the Rio Summit in 1992, there has been growing recognition of the need to address the issues of poverty and deforestation in national and regional programmes and even on a continental scale.[3,4] For example, in 2019 the AU validated its Sustainable Forest Management Framework 2020-2030 as a means to contribute to achieving its Agenda 2063 objectives. However, these initiatives have had little impact in reversing the decline in capacity to sustainably manage African forests. This policy brief focuses on five key challenges to address at the national, sub-regional and regional levels: first, harmonisation of national and regional forestry policies;[5] second, incorporation of stronger anti-corruption measures in national and regional forestry policies; third, establishment of strong communication systems at the regional level to strengthen the implementation of forestry policies; fourth, establishment of strong institutional structures to define ambitious and integrated NDCs and translate them into tangible investment programmes and project pipelines; and last, identification and resolution of problems that prevent climate money from really making a difference on the ground.

The policy brief is organised in three main sections to address these challenges. The first section examines the extent to which poor governance, institutional weaknesses and corruption are major obstacle to sustainable forest management (SFM) in Africa. The second describes a worst case scenario and forecasts a more vulnerable continent in which forest coverage continues to decline as leaders expect more external funding that will only be delayed. Suggestions are then proposed in the third section on ways to ensure SFM in Africa. These are addressed in particular to the Regional Economic Committees (REC) and their member states.

2. INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESSES, POOR GOVERNANCE AND CORRUPTION PREVENTING SFM IN AFRICA

2.1 Overview of forest cover and the deforestation rate in Africa

1 Meattle C, Padmanabhi R, Fernandes P de A, et al. Landscape of Climate Finance in Africa. Published online in September 2022. climatepolicyinitiative.org

2 Darwall W, Polidoro B, Smith K and Somda J. Ecosystem profile of Guinean Forests in West Africa biodiversity hotspot. Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund Report. Published online in 2015

3 Connolly C. Constraints on sustainable forest management of Africa's humid forests: the ATIBT experience. The International Forestry Review. 2006; 8(1):78-82.

4 Geldenhuys C J, Ham C and Ham H. Sustainable Forest Management in Africa: Some Solutions to Natural Forest Management Problems in Africa. In Department of Forest and Wood Science Stellenbosch University; 2008

5 Nganje M. Trans-boundary forest resources in West and Central Africa. Available at: https://afforum.org/publication/trans-boundary-forest-resources-in-west-and-central-africa/

In 2020, Africa had approximately 637 million hectares of forest (approximately 16% of the world's forested area and about 23% of the continent's total land area). Of this, 46.5% is located in eastern and southern Africa, 48% in western and central Africa and 5.5% in northern Africa. The forests vary from tropical rainforests to warm-temperate forests to tropical-subtropical deciduous woodlands and wooded savannas.[6] Unfortunately, forest cover in Africa is declining at an alarming rate (by 3.28 million hectares a year in 1990 up to 3.94 million hectares in 2020). According to the FAO, the annual deforestation rate in west and central Africa went beyond 1.3 million hectares between 2010 and 2018.

Even though the causes of this deforestation are the combined effects of human activities and climate effects, an extensive literature review conducted by P.M. Maina in 2018 revealed the extent to which poor governance, institutional weaknesses and corruption play huge roles. Accelerated forest loss occurs when institutional configurations allow abuse and create an opportunity for forests to become incorporated in patronage networks, which create incentives for state actors to increase their accumulation of forest resources for political purposes with no concern for sustainability whatsoever.[7],[8]. An absence of adequate forest management capacities has also favoured inappropriate institutional mechanisms, and lack of transparency has favoured large-scale illegal operations.

The following sections will discuss these challenges and how they hinder SFM in Africa.

2.2 Poor governance and institutional weaknesses in the forestry sector in Africa

Policy implementation failure is a major issue in Africa's forest management. For instance, in 2019 the African Union adopted the Sustainable Forest Management Framework for Africa 2020-2030 while encouraging the RECs and their member states to adopt and implement it.[9] Although there have been some efforts to apply the framework, both the public and private sectors face a number of constraints connected with land and tree tenure, and inadequate incentives to adopt it. One key challenge in practice concerns the integration of forest data and harmony between national, sub-regional and regional forest policies, objectives and societal demands. This is due to the absence of a proper communication mechanism between forest actors and differences in national interests.

The weak adoption of forest law enforcement measures has also contributed to the failure of SFM in Africa. The African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG) initiative, which was put in place in Yaoundé in 2003, could have contributed to legal and institutional reforms in the forestry sector in countries in Africa hosting important forests (e.g. those in the Congo Basin and along the Upper Guinean Coast), implementation of new logging control systems, better monitoring of forestry activities and greater stakeholder participation in forest management. However, the AFLEG has been ineffective as the political will was not translated into proactivity and mobilisation of financial resources.[10] To go further, the European Union (EU) offered timber producing countries Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA) to strengthen forest governance and promote trade in verified legal timber. These voluntary partnership agreements, which came into force in 2011, are 'officially' in force in Central Africa, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). However, despite large financial investments, these countries still face many hurdles and challenges in the implementation of the VPAs.[11]

It is also important to highlight that most of the productive forests are under public ownership and despite the efforts being made to apply participatory approaches to managing high-value forest areas, much work needs to be

6 Ibid - Geldenhuys C J, Ham C and Ham H. (2008)
7 Maina PM. Impact of poor governance on deforestation in Africa. Available at: https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JAAS/article/view/58759
8 Atyi E. Assessing Progress in Forest Law Enforcement and Governance in Africa. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Assessing_progress_in_forest_law_enforcement_and_governance_in_Africa.pdf
9 Ibid – African Union (2019)
10 Ibid – Atyi (2018)
11 Ibid – Atyi (2018)

done.[12]

2.3 Corruption

In nations with powerful institutions, forest governance is often associated with principles such as transparency, participation and accountability. Nonetheless, corruption within and around the forest sector in Africa is considered to undermine the framing, implementation and subsequent monitoring of forest policies. Two sub-types of corruption have been identified, namely economic corruption and social corruption. Economic corruption involves exchanges of tangible goods (cash, official positions, material goods). The misuse and misappropriation of available funds is a common practice. Social corruption generally involves exchanges of intangibles (such as favours, social status, and power). Forest resources are exchanged for profit by the stewards of the forest allowing illegal logging, inappropriate agriculture and unlawful collection of non-timber forest products from local forests. An example is the ongoing illicit exploitation of Nkula (a rosewood lookalike species) in Mozambique, where weak governance, corruption and poverty in a post-conflict state have enabled a range of activities that underpin both abuse of labour rights and deforestation.

3. A MORE VULNERABLE AFRICA SUBJECT TO CLIMATE FINANCE

Claiming climate finance is a just cause as developed nations have a moral obligation to assist developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change effects to which they have contributed less. Even so, it is the responsibility of all nations to combat climate change with a sincere mind-set and with or without assistance. Relaying on climate finance alone will only make Africa more vulnerable. Ever since the Paris agreement, poor governance and corruption (misuse and misappropriation of available funds) has resulted in little or no visible impact in protecting the continent. Calls for climate justice will continue to be high at the next COP, but the results will be yet to be seen.

In a world with uncertainty about what global event might occur, the vulnerability of Africa will only worsen if self-resilience actions are not consciously and sincerely taken by Africans. The available funds, as little as they are today, will be even scarcer. Therefore, efficient and effective use of available resources is necessary to make as much impact as possible.

Since 2020, countries have been submitting their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) with each one supposedly reflecting an increasingly high degree of ambition compared to the previous one. Additionally, to better frame efforts towards the long-term goal, the Paris agreement invites countries to formulate and submit long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies (LT-LEDS). African countries produce their NDCs and LT-LEDS separately. The programmes and projects could be more impactful on a larger scale if they were integrated with those of neighbouring countries.

Considering case scenarios in which developed countries have to face socio-economic crises like the war in Ukraine or global pandemics like Covid-19, which has affected many economies around the world, it is likely that climate finance will continue to be delayed and, worse, countries in the global north may find themselves forced to turn back to more polluting sources of energy. An example of this is the announcement by several EU member states, including France, that they will shift back to coal-fired power as a response to the energy crisis caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Climate change is already threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions of Africans, exacerbating displacement and chronic underdevelopment in countries that already face economic, governance and security vulnerabilities. Nations are already experiencing serious hindrance to their GDP growth due the negative effects of climate change. For example, cyclone Idai, which hit Mozambique

12 Siry J P, Cubbage F C and Ahmed M Rukunuddin. Sustainable Forest Management: Global Treads and Opportunities. Forest Policy and Economics. 2005; 7(4):551-561. doi:10.1016/j.forpol.2003.09.003

in 2019, brought down the country's GDP growth from 6.6% before the disaster to 2.3% afterwards. In the worst climate scenario, in which the earth's temperature would rise 4°C by the end of the century, African GDP would decline by 7.04%-12.12% according to the World Meteorological Organization's first climate report on Africa. In a medium warming scenario GDPs would fall between 3.3% and 0.28%. It is estimated that by the 2080s the proportion of arid and semi-arid land in Africa is likely to increase by 5% to 8%.[13]

While Africa is suffering the most from climate change, it also has the most available solutions. Forest ecosystems are crucial for climate mitigation and adaptation, as they regulate water flows, slow down drought and protect coastal communities from extreme events and sea level rises. They also provide local communities with services and facilitate migration by wild animals.

Climate finance commitments by countries giving aid are based on the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. All states are responsible for addressing global environmental destruction, but not all states are equally responsible for it. However, most climate finance is allocated in the form of loans, which further contributes to the debt crisis many African states face. Between 2014 and 2018, more adaptation-related finance was provided as loans (57%) than as grants (42%).[14] Poor and often highly indebted countries are expected to pay back money for adapting to climate hazards that they have done very little to cause. Apart from climate justice, at a practical level, grant-based finance has higher disbursement rates than loans. Adaptation finance could make a bigger difference if more of it was provided in the form of grants.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Harmonise national and regional forest policies by 2030

Successful regional forest policy harmonisation requires definition of cooperative approaches aimed at identifying divergent factors and targeting areas where it is possible to provide and implement a common framework. By prioritising collaboration and information sharing to identify divergent and convergent interests, areas where it is possible to make large-scale positive impacts in sustainable management of transboundary forests can be identified. It is also necessary to create digital databases and make them available at the national and regional levels, which can allow information to be integrated.

4.2 Establish strong communication systems at the regional level to strengthen the implementation of forest policies

Stronger communication platforms for REC member states should embrace the pillars of participation by stakeholders, capacity development and empowerment of grassroots institutions (e.g. Community Forest Associations, NGOs, CSOs, youth champions, media etc.). Frequent meetings between these key actors, especially those sharing the same forests, should be organised to improve information sharing (including data gathering) and further drive harmonisation of policies.

4.3 Incorporate stronger anti-corruption measures in national and regional forest policies

REC member states should raise the issue of corruption up to the policy level by incorporating key dimensions of anti-corruption strategies, the rule of law, equity, accountability, transparency, participation and integrity in the forestry sector at the national and regional levels. People responsible for losing money or allowing illegal activities at any level, from decision-makers to local stakeholders, should be held accountable. Governments must be willing to allow full implementation of regional and AU policies such as the SFM framework 2020-2030 and the AFLEGT Action Plan, especially those in Central, Eastern, Western

13 McCarthy J J, Canziani O F, Leary N A, Dokken D J and White K S. Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Contribution of Working Group II to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Vol 2. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
14 Ibid – Meattle et al. (2022)

and Southern Africa.

4.4 Establish robust institutional structures to set ambitious integrated NDCs and translate them into tangible investment programmes and project pipelines

RECs and their member states must put in place robust institutional structures to set ambitious NDCs and translate them into tangible investment programmes and project pipelines. Sub-regional and regional interests should be put up front and concerted efforts should be made to boost domestic resource mobilisation to ensure the long-term sustainability of the necessary investments.

The AU and its member states should put pressure on highly industrialised nations to accelerate their transitions to net zero emissions. Country platforms, such as the one that South Africa launched for its just energy transition at COP26, can be adopted by other countries for this purpose. No matter what efforts are made on the African continent, if the highly industrialised nations do not stop emitting greenhouse gases, Africa will continue to bear the cost of global warming.

4.5 Identify and resolve problems preventing climate money from actually making a difference on the ground

Climate finance providers and recipients (RECs and their member states) must identify and solve problems preventing money from actually making a difference on the ground. Funders must reconsider the quality of the finance, in particular whether it is provided in a just and effective form. A mechanism should be put in place at the national and regional levels to ensure that mobilised resources are properly utilised. With Africa's major economic sectors being vulnerable to current climate sensitivity, Africa must be the first to honestly mitigate climate change and capitalise on the available resources, especially the climate finance it receives, while asking for more.

5. CONCLUSION

While Africa is suffering the most from climate change, it also has the most available solutions. Forest ecosystems are crucial for climate mitigation and adaptation, as they regulate water flows, slow down drought and protect coastal communities from extreme events and sea level rises. They also provide local communities with services and facilitate migration by wild animals. The RECs and their member states have a role in combating deforestation in Africa. It is time to set ambitious objectives and make plans implementable by 2030. By prioritising communication and collaboration, countries sharing borders will be able to identify similar actions which are useful for policy harmonisation. This is also key to producing integrated NDCS and developing sub-regional or region-scale projects and programmes that are bankable with higher impacts. The role of governments in understanding the problems in implementing forest policies and that governance weakness and corruption constrain the achievement of conservation goals is at stake. This policy brief has looked at the role and responsibility of regional and national leaders (decision-makers) in the forestry sector and how they determine the appearance of forests in a region. The literature review carried out by P.M. Maina in 2018 on the impact of poor governance on deforestation in Africa has helped to identify various forms of corruption and institutional witnesses on the continent.[15] Forests are indispensable for the survival of humankind and animals. Successful and sustainable management of them is mandatory.

15 Ibid – Maina (2018)

The School of Transnational Governance (STG) delivers teaching and high-level training in the methods, knowledge, skills and practice of governance beyond the State. Based within the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, the School brings the worlds of academia and policy-making together in an effort to navigate a context, both inside and outside Europe, where policy-making increasingly transcends national borders.

The School offers Executive Training Seminars for experienced professionals and a Policy Leaders Fellowship for early- and mid-career innovators. The School also hosts expert Policy Dialogues and distinguished lectures from transnational leaders (to include the STG's Leaders Beyond the State series which recorded the experiences of former European Institution presidents, and the Giorgio La Pira Lecture series which focuses on building bridges between Africa and Europe). In September 2020, the School launched its Master-of-Arts in Transnational Governance (MTnG), which will educate and train a new breed of policy leader able to navigate the unprecedented issues our world will face during the next decade and beyond.

The STG Policy Papers Collection aims to further the EUI School of Transnational Governance's goal in creating a bridge between academia and policy and provide actionable knowledge for policy-making. The collection includes Policy Points (providing information at-a-glance), Policy Briefs (concise summaries of issues and recommended policy options), and Policy Analyses (in-depth analysis of particular issues). The contributions provide topical and policy-oriented perspectives on a diverse range of issues relevant to transnational governance. They are authored by STG staff and guest authors invited to contribute on particular topics.

School of Transnational Governance
European University Institute
Via Camillo Cavour 65, Firenze, FI 50129
Email: stg.publications@eui.eu

www.eui.eu/stg

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

doi: 10.2870/061283
ISBN: 978-92-9466-421-1
ISSN: 2600-271X
QM-BA-23-022-EN-N