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Prospects and Actions in Africa to cope with Climate Change Effects

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Executive Summary

- The ramifications of climate change, environmental protection and possibly related hazards in Africa entail various aspects of risks (economic, social, political, etc). Hence, these complex issues would require compound solutions. As a matter of fact, method and tailored solutions based on empirical findings and case by case bases are imposing themselves more than ever. Accordingly, can constantly evolving approaches like governance processes bridge the gap between what is local, regional and international to find common ground solutions for African countries? This study will be an attempt to ponder a few avenues that can be pursued by African States to mitigate climate change effects.

The assumption “*too much information kills information*” is definitely relevant to this study where billions of people around the world became immune to the repeated calls ad nauseam for environmental protection and the recurrent warnings as to the foreseeable devastating impact of climate change.

The perception of the ramifications of climate change, environmental protection and other possibly related hazards in Africa are no exception to this pattern. Moreover, “*scientists further predict that the current pace of warming is ten times faster than that observed in any other time in the last 65 million years*” (Lopes, 2019).

Thus far, it became self-explanatory that climate change is a complex and multifaceted issue that entails various aspects of risks (economic, social, political, etc). Accordingly, complex issues would require compound solutions. In other words, as much as the climate change phenomenon involves the responsibility of various actors, it can also be part of other issues that need to be solved in their own right.

For instance, experts in the field of global health became increasingly cognizant of the fact that certain challenges pertaining to health and climate change form an indivisible whole. To illustrate this, while elaborating the Global Charter for Public’s Health, they rightly stated that certain public health issues call for components derived from across a variety of other services and functions, among which climate change and sustainability.

Equally important, in terms of decision-making, policies that do not directly apply to the realm of land and energy, for instance those on transport and environment, may increase the chances of better tackling climate change, as long as they are accompanied with swift action.

However, it seems that strategies that are designed to deal with the devastating climate change effects within national governments and at the level of internationally influential organizations like the United Nations are ill-harmonized. Obviously, although some progress can be made in this scope, it appears to be



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limited because of the absent or inadequate responses to these challenges. This gap between the identified problem and the solutions resorted to has also been confirmed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) whose Co-Chair of Working Group I explained: *“There are things we are already doing. We are using technologies and good practices, but they do need to be scaled up and used in other suitable places that they are not being used in now”* (Zhai, 2019).

As a matter of fact, in a situation where the multiplicity of variables, players and challenges involved revealed to be a general trend worldwide, it seems that method and tailored solutions based on empirical findings and case by case bases are imposing themselves more than ever.

How does Africa cope with these quick environmental mutations? A great number of African States find themselves torn between the internal imperatives for their survival and the progressively compelling international norms that are meant to standardize States’ behaviors to reach common objectives like the Sustainable Development Goals. Can novel and constantly evolving approaches like good governance processes bridge the gap between what is local, regional and international to find common ground solutions for African countries? This study will be an attempt to ponder a few avenues that can be explored by African States to mitigate climate change effects.

Good governance as a lighthouse? is it a valid response to a divided world over climate change?

One of the models that can arguably be used as a framework for the design of efficient strategies to cope with the aforementioned daunting obstacles is good governance. Indeed, this latter as suggested in this context, is not an objective per se. It rather stands out as a presumably guiding principle that could be taken into account while shaping policies. Good governance usually embodies a set of tenets that can be adapted to every country’s reality and constraints. It is both a process to be followed and a reference to be consulted for a balanced approach. It starts with problem identification and culminates with flexible solutions production. Moreover, since several challenges may affect several levels of governance, and because governance-processes are different at the international, national and subnational levels, solutions found for one level may not work for another. *“President Trump’s decision against the Climate Accord and the ‘Swiss law first initiative’ of*

the Swiss People’s Party are good examples for showcasing these implementation difficulties” (Gyger, 2019).

Likewise, solutions that are the outcome of good governance processes can by no means be blindly duplicated in other contexts without considering the particularity of each and every setting. Despite the wide media coverage of climate change and the recurring calls of numerous Civil Society entities for the mitigation of its effects, it appears that opting for ‘drastic green measures’ by governments can definitely not work if they stand in stark opposition to other vital priorities. One of the most striking examples of this assumption is “the yellow vests movement”.

A wave of protests started spreading in France as early as November 2018 when segments of malcontent people voiced their disappointment and anger in reaction to a surge in fuel taxes that the French President imposed with the aim to decrease energy consumption and promote an environmentally-friendly agenda. This change was also meant to maintain the budget deficit under control and conform it to EU requirements. Subsequently, it can be advanced that prior to any policy conception by governments; States need to define what is exactly meant by the “State’s priority” as opposed to the grassroots’ priority.

Assessment of Climate Change action against the backdrop of Goal 13 (SDGs) in 2019

The UN General Assembly Special Session adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be implemented by the target date of 2015. These eight goals vary from the reduction of poverty rate to ensuring environmental sustainability. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are successors to the MDGs and are meant to eliminate most of the hindrances that prevent or slow down sustainable development—for example: unsustainable production patterns, inequalities, dysfunctions within institutions, and climate change and environmental dilapidation—that the MDG did not fully scrutinize.

The UN Secretary General’s report on “progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals” that was issued in the aftermath of the General Assembly Resolution 70/1 (bearing on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) broadly acknowledges that progress has been made during the last four years in terms of SDGs. However, this same report indicates in its special edition that certain goals and targets benefited from positive action for change more than



others (Report of the UNSG, E/2019/68).

In the specific case of climate change and its impact, it seems that the situation is alarming for three reasons. First, a brief discourse analysis of Goal 13: *“Take urgent actions to combat climate change and its impact”* unveils that one of the salient parts of the present Goal is the word “urgent”. Indeed, the wording of this Goal is highly telling in the sense that not only does it call for a line of conduct to be followed by the International Community but it also sensitizes and draws attention as to the urgency of the matter. Therefore, this goal should be compelling by definition (if compared to all the other development goals) because of the time pressure that is inherently embedded in it.

Second, predictions and speculations pertaining to the pace and the dangerousness of its ramifications were not accurately assessed by the International Community in general and by the UN and its agencies, in particular. Indeed, most of these predictions proved wrong since the increasing greenhouse gas emissions accelerated the speed of climate change, leading to worrying effects that were felt all over the globe. Moreover, the disasters that took place over the last recent years were shocking both in terms of the high proportions of their ensuing losses and the diversity of the causes that led to them. *“Between 1998 and 2017 climate-related and geophysical disasters killed 1.3 million people and left a further 4.4 billion injured, homeless, displaced or in need of emergency assistance. While the majorities of fatalities were due to geophysical events, mostly earthquakes and tsunamis, 91% of all disasters were caused by floods, storms, droughts, heatwaves and other extreme weather events”* (Wallemacq, 2017).

Third, it appears that even the variables on which specialists were focusing to assess climate and environmental risks are no longer completely valid. Threats whose occurrence used to be considered remote by experts are overwhelmingly being accepted as a new reality. Similarly, although the quantitative study of patterns is crucial to gauge and evaluate climate change effects, it became a risky enterprise to rely solely on the past as an indicator to predict the future. To better illustrate this, risk analyses particularly highlight values that are economically related to the estimated cost of specific disaster types. These evaluations usually take into account risk, exposure and vulnerability patterns. Nonetheless, it seems that these patterns fail to showcase reality, on a daily basis, since climate change effects are evolving faster than these very patterns.

Pattern and Prospects for Africa

It should be stated that the African countries are no exception to the previously mentioned dramatic climatic trend. *“The severe droughts of 2011 in the Horn of Africa and the 2012 drought in the Sahel region affected over 23 million people”* (Lopes, 2019). In addition, *“regions in Africa within 15 degrees of the equator are projected to experience an increase in hot nights as well as longer and more frequent heat waves...Every bit of additional warming adds greater risks for Africa in the form of greater droughts, more heat waves and more potential crop failures”* (Shepard, 2019).

However, before addressing further details, it can be argued that any endeavor to assess economic losses in Africa will not be thoroughly reliable either because of the absence or lack of data documentation or because of systematic underreporting. *“Throughout the period 1998-2017, economic losses data only exist for 37% of disasters; the direct cost of the majority of disasters (63%) is unknown or not well documented”* (Wallemacq, 2017).

Unfortunately, lack of information can have damaging effects on development and economic growth for it makes it quasi impossible to maintain sustainability and build resilience. The economic losses that may result from the emergence of new risk or the aggravation of existing levels of hazard can have serious human and economic costs. At any rate, relying on the available sources, it appears that the climate change impact might have heavy odds against African people. Unfortunately, this Continent is still lagging behind, in terms of economic growth, if compared to other world economic driving forces (like the EU for instance). Yet, any attempt to enhance this gloomy developmental conjuncture will either be slowed down or completely blocked because of the unpredictable climate.

West Africa has been particularly affected by climate-change. Unless this hazard is met with proper action, crop yields and production will dramatically decrease and subsequently affect food security in this region. Southern Africa will equally be impacted. The Southern part of Africa may witness more severe and frequent droughts toward the end of the 21st century. Needless to mention that South Africa, for example, operates in its own capacity as an agricultural products provider (exporter). Therefore, if this region is badly affected by climate change, it may have a domino effect on other nearby countries in Africa.

All in all, it can be advanced that there is a significant gap between the evolution of the situation of climate change and the actions taken by States and other



relevant entities to mitigate the effects of such a change, especially for the African and the least developed countries. Perhaps, one of the African regions that can portray this dichotomy is the Sahel region where temperature keeps rising, population continues growing while natural resources are rapidly plummeting.

Positive steps have been taken with regard to the climate finance flows and the expansion of nationally determined contributions. Yet, far more consolidated efforts and developed plans and actions impose themselves more than ever. African countries, especially those ranking among the least developed countries, along with small island developed States should see their capacity strengthened and have access to finance at a faster pace.

Similarly, despite the multiple commitments of African States at the international level to abide by the 2030 Agenda, with a special focus on SDG13, the structures that are designed for that purpose are not elaborate enough to accommodate the particular needs of the different African countries. Africa's eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are still in the stage of testing the right approaches to adopt to forge ahead with the reconciliation between what is expected from African countries as opposed to reality on the ground. Partly, this gap may explain the continuous rapprochement between the African Union and the United Nations, through various structures and initiatives (Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa (RECs), African Union Commission, PAIDA...).

SWOT analysis: turning weaknesses into strengths?

Strengths pertaining to resources in Africa: Africa is a huge reservoir of natural resources and manpower. Weaknesses that hamper growth in Africa: huge deficits pertaining to industrialization and governance climate change policies. Opportunities that can be explored: building from scratch a green model of industrialization. Threats relating to the impact of climate change on the agri-food sector: food products that are dependent on rain falls might be dramatically reduced in the near future. *It was expected that by 2020, yields from rain-fed agriculture in several African countries would drop by as much as half.*

According to the African Development Bank Group, *“seven of the 10 countries that are most vulnerable to climate change are in Africa”*. Moreover, *“in 2015, four African countries ranked among the 10 countries most affected: Mozambique (1st), Malawi (3rd), Ghana and Madagascar (joint 8th position)”* (African Development Bank Group, 2019).

This situation could be further exacerbated by acute shortages of water in certain regions in Africa, like in the Sub-Saharan region. Also, a rapid demographic growth (population projected to double over the next 40 years) does not put a positive spin on this situation.

It would be relevant to point out, in this vein, that *“from 2008 to 2011, drought caused economic losses equivalent to 3.9 percent of Djibouti’s GDP per annum”* (African Development Bank Group, 2019).

At any rate, the emphasis will be placed at this level of the study on the opportunities that can be explored by African States. Basically, the very fact that most of African countries have not been yet in a position to catch up with developed countries (in terms of industrialization) could be used in itself as an opportunity to be exploited. It would be mere “redundancy” to attempt to reproduce foreign industrialization models in Africa that have already proven their failure to adjust to future ecological imperatives. The Continent needs to reduce its carbon emissions, by rationalizing the use of its resources along with decreasing the harm to the environment.

Another opportunity that fully deserves the attention of African nations is the model of circular economy (CE). This concept is increasingly becoming a global resilient growth model. It consists of recycling products and materials and reusing them within an industrial process that makes an optimal use of waste.

Simply put, the idea behind CE is to maintain the use of products, equipment and infrastructure for longer time.

“Creating and optimizing resource ‘loops’ along value chains could help meet the material needs of growing populations through drastically lower rates of per capita primary resource use. The CE is now a core component both of the EU’s 2050 Long-Term Strategy to achieve a climate-neutral Europe and of China’s five-year plans. Japan has tabled the CE as a priority for the 2019 G20 summit” (Preston, 2019).

Conversely, adjusting an already established industry, that obeys a sheer profit-based logic, to completely new conditions may rather be more challenging. It can be argued that the coming years present an opportunity not only for the major economic poles (EU, China, Japan...etc.) but also for African States that should not isolate themselves from this pattern that suggests aligning CE strategies with climate action and sustainable development commitments at the national and international level.



Conclusions

Connecting the dots: can SDGs solve the climate dilemma within a holistic governance approach?

IPCC, the world's foremost authority for assessing the science of climate change, says it is still possible to limit global temperature rise to 1.5° C—if, and only if, there are “*rapid and far-reaching transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities*” (Shepard, 2019). It can be assumed that the only way to connect the dots: that is to say to deal with all the elements at hand: namely SDGs, climate change and environmental protection...etc., without neglecting the urgency aspect of taking action, is the adoption of an eclectic approach of governance that derives its strength of the diversity of its components. For instance, in the aftermath of the 70th United Nations General Assembly that was held starting from 15 September 2015, numerous experts and observers delved into considering how could good governance practices and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) be integrated into existing African Development frameworks. They even went further to believe that the success of such an endeavor in the Dark Continent will depend on African leaders' ability to integrate human rights and good governance reforms in their respective countries. Of course, Africa's regional economic communities (RECs), in addition to other regional and international cohorts, can highly contribute to advancing good governance, peace and justice.

It seems that the flaw in this reasoning is twofold: first, the aforementioned statements imply importing whatever SDG (or other concepts) and implementing them at local levels. Yet, every State has its own particularity and special attributes that makes it different from other countries. Because of this assumed particularity of each and every State, no “ready-made” solution or concept can be imported and implemented “in the raw”, no matter how elaborate and refined it is. To put it simply, any imported solution has to be adapted to the local context in order to be practically productive. Second, the correlation, for example, between SDG 16 and the existing African development frameworks, has to be built on more equity. That is to say, existing African structures, like the RECs and the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa, have to partially incorporate and embrace SDGs in their development efforts and at the same time, they have to influence, in their own right, the existing already agreed upon SDGs. Nonetheless, it should be stated that any attempt to harmonize these complex policies and actions across the three important governance layers (national, regional and international) would incur a

high price. To illustrate this, “*Africa will need investments of over \$3 trillion in mitigation and adaptation by 2030 in order to implement its Nationally Determined Contributions*” to the Paris Agreement (African Development Bank Group, 2019).

As far as the aforementioned eclectic governance approach is concerned, it would derive its strength and efficiency from a wide range of actors to avoid the sole and biased control of State actors. Perhaps, the recent mushrooming youth climate change advocacy campaigns and protests as well as the other climate actions taken by numerous actors (from all walks of life and specialty) around the world are all positive indicators of the rising awareness of the importance of this issue. At the regional level, Morocco, Ghana, Ivory Coast, to name but a few, are all African countries whose civil societies decided to take up the fight against inertia, and join the Global Climate Strike that witnessed a large mobilization throughout all the World regions between the 20th and the 27th September 2019. These African voices are part of a global movement that is increasingly transcending borders (‘enshrined’ in the traditional notion of a Nation State) to spread across over 150 countries, where people stepped up to express their advocacy in line with young climate strikers and demanded an end to the use of fossil fuels. It seems that these “green” trans-border actions as well as all the other efforts made within local, regional and international frameworks are all constructive and heading towards the right direction. Nevertheless, given their pace and scattered nature, they should be ‘molded’ in governance processes approaches both downstream and upstream. To put it simply, these efforts might need to be coordinated up to a point where they reach a matrix where governance principles and processes (inspired by all the relevant practical and theoretical findings) will serve as a guiding roadmap. At the national and local levels, countries might need to shape their policies in line with all SDGs (that feed each other). At the regional level, national coordinated efforts should reflect both local and international realities; and at the international level, policies and decisions should depart from the logic of coercion and provide enticing incentives for African countries to move forward.

All in all, it can be argued that policies and actions that are conducted through the lens of good governance and SDGs (mainly Goal 13) to mitigate climate change effects are by no means mutually exclusive with profit making. However, in order to maintain balance between environmental protection and lucrative gains, the stakeholders would need to have a “*skin in the game*” and avoid politicizing climate change.



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