

AFRICA'S CLIMATE CHANGE REALITY: THE AFRICAN INITIATIVE CONGRESS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

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The African continent is expected to bear a much heavier burden than the industrialized world as its people strive to cope with climate change and its far-reaching impacts on food security, health, energy, migration and conflict. Africa's vulnerable ecosystem and varied geography, its strong dependence on agriculture, rapid population growth, widespread poverty, and limited capacity and resources will make it difficult for the continent to cope with unanticipated weather events.

Against this backdrop, The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) co-hosted "The African Initiative Congress on Climate Change" in partnership with Makerere University and the Salama SHIELD Foundation at the Munyonyo Speke Resort in Kampala, Uganda, on November 1-4, 2009.¹ More than 750 policy makers, academics, experts, students and representatives from

nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies and donor countries attended the event, which initiated a nationwide dialogue in Uganda building on the existing knowledge base articulated in the Ugandan government's official National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA).

Participants included Ugandan cabinet ministers and senior officials, and more than 300 school children whose attendance was championed by Nelson Sewankambo, director of the African Initiative, for their role in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts. Sessions were held over four days and covered topics ranging from assessing regional needs in combating climate change to human, technical and resource mobilization. The policy recommendations that emerged from the Congress are summarized at the end of this report.

The African Initiative Congress on Climate Change was hosted by CIGI in partnership with Makerere University and the Salama SHEILD Foundation. Funding support for the Congress was provided by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

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Addressing International Governance Challenges

KEY ISSUES DISCUSSED

Climate Change: Continent-Wide Impacts

“Climate change is already here,” declared Samkange Stanlake of the UN World Food Programme.

Coastlines are disappearing in West Africa, landslides are eroding the landscape in East Africa, vector-borne disease rates are climbing in previously disease-free high elevation zones, and crop yields are diminishing across the greater part of the continent. Distinct changes in weather patterns are reported to be affecting livelihoods and general human well being.

“Dry seasons are becoming drier and the wet seasons are becoming wetter,” remarked Patrick Mwesigye, regional industry officer for Africa at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

Even within recognizable seasons, unseasonal events such as heavier rains, dry spells, destructive storms and temperature fluctuations are increasing. Kenyans, Tanzanians and Ugandans — who share Lake Victoria — struggle with water levels that have been falling since 2005, and with the effects of devastating flooding in the East and in the North in 2008. Without programs in place to address these environmental instabilities, Africans will be left with increasingly uninhabitable conditions.

Coping with Climate Change: Adaptation over Mitigation

“Adaptation measures first, mitigation measures second” was the message repeated by the Hon. Maria Mutagamba, Uganda’s Minister of Water and Environment. Without a commitment to addressing climate change, increased emergencies and rising relief needs will be the predictable consequences. Congress participants emphasized that reactive responses to such emergencies are more costly and

resource-intensive than preventive measures. Proactive measures, however, require government initiative and increased cooperation among governments, NGOs and other international organizations. To date, such multilateralism has not been sufficiently realized.

While adaptation is the preferred strategy, Africans already affected cope by migrating to urban areas, coasts, valleys and other areas that are currently less susceptible to high temperatures, extreme rainfall and drought. Affected individuals move to these more hospitable regions as their own lands become unproductive and uninhabitable. Migration is Africa’s greatest coping mechanism — but it is not sustainable. Congress delegates concurred that action at the governance level is needed to prevent overpopulation in already overcrowded regions. Specific recommendations included strengthening livelihoods and economies by fostering climate-relevant ways of earning a living; and making more use of adaptation technologies such as early warning weather systems. To achieve these objectives, medium- and long-term planning is needed, as well as strategies that will lessen the human contribution to climate change and policies that strengthen the environment’s capacity in the face of a changing climate.

Poverty and Development

“Climate change is compounding our concern for poverty and development,” said Franklyn Lisk, a Sierra Leonean who is a visiting professorial research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation at the University of Warwick, UK.

While North Americans typically view climate change as a strictly environmental issue, in Africa climate change is inextricably linked to people’s living conditions. Changing climate is exacerbating poverty by reducing access to food and clean water, among other things, while simultaneously having negative effects on health and security. There are many documented cases:

- Temperature fluctuations are affecting growing seasons and the types of crops that can be grown, resulting in increased malnutrition and famine.
- As farmlands become infertile — through desertification and flooding — farmers are forced to move elsewhere in search of arable land, giving rise to conflict and territorial disputes.
- Desertification caused by climate change forces farmers to slash and burn new fields for their crops, and as a result affects the forest ecosystem.

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- Increases in malaria infection rates and other diseases are taxing health care systems that are already suffering shortages of staff, facilities and medication.

Climate change should be integrated into the policy debate surrounding poverty and development in Africa. Further study may yield a holistic approach to adaptation and mitigation that will benefit the more than 300 million Africans living in poverty.

Giving Priority to Policy Implementation

“It is our duty to stop talking and start taking action on climate change,” said Henry Aryamanya Mugisha, executive director of Uganda’s National Environment Management Authority (NEMA).

Policy makers attending the Congress emphasized that a gap exists between creating policy and implementing it in their regions, especially surrounding environmental legislation. They emphasized the need to dedicate increased research and resources to policy implementation at local, regional and national levels. With an extensive body of policy surrounding environmental management, including its NAPA document, Uganda possesses the foundation for a well-rounded climate change strategy — yet for the most part this not been acted upon.

Current government programs and ministries are woefully underfunded. Uganda, for example, spends less than 1 percent of the national budget on its environment portfolio, of which climate change is just one of many competing priorities. According to Gilbert Ouma, meteorologist at the University of Nairobi, “Adaptation measures are expected to cost 5 to 10 percent of the GDP.”

Specifically, programs are needed that raise awareness of current policies and which offer ways to implement sustainable livelihood options. Good governance practices must be among the first steps for many nations, coupled with improved implementation of policies and compliance with agreed-upon standards. To facilitate these ends, Congress attendees advocated improved dissemination of information

using appropriate means; research and analysis on effective budget allocation among relevant policies and programs; and new and improved ways to incentivize stakeholders to follow through on effective policy.

Climate Change and Gender

Awareness of gender issues is crucial to shaping responses to climate change and environmental policy on the continent. This was raised at the Congress as a necessary area of future focus. Most agricultural workers in Africa are women, and with climate change causing reduced yields of both cash crops and food grown for household consumption, their farming livelihoods are threatened in what were once arable regions. Women and girls are also travelling longer distances to collect household necessities such as food, water and firewood. Targeted programs can help women understand better how to cope with unexpected weather events; better access to innovations—especially around energy— can improve their chances of gaining alternative livelihoods. More can be done to bring the underexplored gender dimension into climate change discussions by increasing female representation in relevant government bodies and creating gender-specific education programs and information sharing at the local level.

THE WAY FORWARD: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

After four days of sessions, the following consensus recommendations emerged from the Congress:

1. Augment budgets for ministries addressing climate change issues so that governments at every level have sufficient human and financial resources. This may entail sharing of budgets among cooperating departments to achieve an integrated approach to tackling issues affecting more than one sector. Greater probity in managing public expenditures is also required.
2. Increase collaboration among stakeholders and across government ministries. Ministries grappling with climate change and related issues include those of the environment, disaster preparedness, justice, education, health, energy, and finance, among others.
3. Invest time and resources in land use planning at the government or regional level. Africans face a dilemma over conserving land to protect the ecosystem and opening up land for food production. More regionally-relevant research on appropriate land use allocation needs to be done.

4. Improve the prospects for policy implementation by increasing awareness of current policy and policy levers (especially among local governments) and by undertaking in-depth study on the lag between policy creation and implementation – the reasons for it and what can be done to strengthen implementation at local, regional and national levels.
5. Strengthen livelihoods and economies through ways of earning a living that are climate-appropriate to each region and equip susceptible regions with appropriate adaptation technologies, including early warning weather systems.
6. Create an intergenerational approach to tackling climate change by incorporating climate change adaptation methods into primary and secondary school national curricula.
7. Involve more women in climate change discussions and decision making, increase female representation in the relevant government bodies, and promote gender-specific programs of awareness and information sharing at the local level.

ENDNOTE

1 CIGI launched a Special Report at the Congress titled, “Climate Change in Africa: Adaptation, Mitigation and Governance Challenges,” edited by Hany Besada and Nelson K. Sewankambo. The report is available for download at: <http://www.cigionline.org/node/2952>

POSTSCRIPT – COP15 AND BEYOND

CIGI’s African Initiative Congress on Climate Change took place just prior to COP15, the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen on December 7-18, 2009. COP15 marked the first time that Africa’s political leaders have adopted a strong and unified position in dealing with climate change. As global leaders met to discuss a global climate agreement that goes beyond the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012, the hope was that Africa’s legitimate development needs would be recognized. Indeed, speaking as “one voice” on behalf of the continent’s leaders, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi effectively articulated the African perspective in Copenhagen, but in the end all parties walked away from the conference without an agreement.

In 2011, all eyes will turn to South Africa, where COP17 is set to take place, and where developing countries’ concerns will most likely take centre stage.

Moving forward, African leaders will need to do more to be heard among the presidents and prime ministers of the large emerging economies and other political leaders at the helm of climate change governance. With so many African nations expecting to be severely hit by climate change, the continent will need to build momentum around its most immediate needs in coping with the reality of a warming climate.

WHO WE ARE

The Centre for International Governance Innovation is an independent, nonpartisan think tank that addresses international governance challenges. Led by a group of experienced practitioners and distinguished academics, CIGI supports research, forms networks, advances policy debate, builds capacity, and generates ideas for multilateral governance improvements. Conducting an active agenda of research, events, and publications, CIGI's interdisciplinary work includes collaboration with policy, business and academic communities around the world.

CIGI conducts in-depth research and engages experts and partners worldwide from its extensive networks to craft policy proposals and recommendations that promote change in international public policy. Current research interests focus on international economic and financial governance both for the long-term and in the wake of the 2008-2009 financial crisis; the role of the G20 and the newly emerging powers in the evolution of global diplomacy; Africa and climate change, and other issues related to food and human security.

CIGI was founded in 2002 by Jim Balsillie, co-CEO of RIM (Research In Motion) and collaborates with and gratefully acknowledges support from a number of strategic partners, in particular the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. CIGI gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the Government of Canada to its endowment fund.

Le CIGI a été fondé en 2002 par Jim Balsillie, co-chef de la direction de RIM (Research In Motion). Il collabore avec de nombreux partenaires stratégiques et exprime sa reconnaissance du soutien reçu de ceux-ci, notamment de l'appui reçu du gouvernement du Canada et de celui du gouvernement de l'Ontario. Le CIGI exprime sa reconnaissance envers le gouvernement du Canada pour sa contribution à son Fonds de dotation.



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