

# The political economy of local adaptation planning:

Exploring barriers to Flexible and Forward-looking Decision Making in three districts in Ethiopia, Uganda and Mozambique



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Every effort has been made to faithfully reflect the responses of interviewees for the analysis of this report. However, any inferences made must remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Methods, Scope and Background</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1. The Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA)	3
2.2 The ACCRA approach and research	5
2.3 A Political Economy perspective	6
<b>3. FFDM in development policy and planning</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 The current state of play: How are development actors adapting to change and uncertainty?	9
3.2 A snapshot of development planning at the sub-national level	10
3.3 Other key players in district governance	12
<b>4. Findings and Analysis</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1 Barriers to FFDM within district governance and planning at local level	14
<b>5. Routes forward in promoting adaptive capacity through FFDM</b>	<b>17</b>
5.1 Raising awareness of the benefits of long-term action and planning at the district level	18
5.2 Incentivising action on FFDM	18
5.3 Providing the tools and supporting the agency of district government and development partners to plan for the future	19
5.4 Building on, and strengthening existing institutions and initiatives	19
<b>6. Conclusions</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Annex A. Country contexts</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Annex B. World Bank problem driven political economy framework</b>	<b>29</b>



## Executive summary

Adapting to change and uncertainty is crucial to the sustainability and success of any development intervention. At the international level, evolving global challenges such as climate change, population growth and pressures on scarce natural resources necessitate dynamic decision-making processes that take an iterative and informed approach to planning. At the local level, a failure to acknowledge and address change and uncertainty within development planning may lead to maladaptation. While the need for forward-looking decision making is clearly documented, much of the debate remains heavily conceptual, with scant attention paid to how to do it in practice.

Despite the need for principles of Flexible and Forward-looking Decision Making (FFDM) to be embedded in all stages of development planning, few development programmes adequately consider future changes to their external and internal environments in programme design. Fewer still have sought to instigate the organisational reforms needed to ensure that activities are compatible with future outlooks, and account for change and uncertainty within planning processes. Several key questions thus remain: Why has conventional development programming struggled to deal with change and uncertainty? What are the primary barriers to a flexible forward-looking approach within development contexts? And how can the obstacles to integration and implementation for FFDM be overcome?

In seeking to address some of these queries, this paper explores key institutional barriers in preventing effective FFDM within development policy and programming. More specifically, it explores the influence of various institutional and sociopolitical drivers on the ability of district governance processes to adapt to change and uncertainty. To do this, it synthesises research findings from two phases of research conducted by the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA). The research focuses predominantly on district government and INGO partners in three African countries – namely, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda. Numerous interventions focused on the delivery of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), social protection and sustainable livelihood approaches are examined to understand priorities and processes behind planned activities, and evaluate common barriers to long-term planning. This wealth of information allows a comparison across the three countries and covers a broad spectrum of sociopolitical contexts and hazards. It also provides an insightful snapshot of the complex and rigid arrangements that govern development policy and practice in Africa.

The paper points to the strong influence of institutional and sociopolitical barriers to FFDM at the local level. It highlights the benefits of using a political economy analysis (PEA), and points to four entry points for overcoming key barriers and promoting adaptive capacity. Finally, it argues that, while incremental changes to policy and programming can result in large gains, system-wide transformation (in terms of interest, motivations and incentives) is needed in order for FFDM to be effectively adopted across scales.

# 1. Introduction



**IMPROVING THE CAPACITY** of countries and communities to adapt to change will be crucial in achieving long-term prosperity. Key to this is ensuring that processes of decision making are able to prepare and accommodate for change and uncertainty. In the context of development policy and programming, this applies not only to financial and technical support provided by development actors, but to their own organisational structures.

Though hard to characterise, given its diverse range of actors, criticisms of the development sector's relative rigidity and shorter-termism remain, both in terms of delivered outputs and the coordination of its internal operations (Stubbs, 2003; Sridar, 2010; Clarke, 2011; ECODE, 2011). Reasons for this are numerous and largely reflect wider issues of the political economy within the system as a whole.

Recognising this shortfall, the development sector is slowly awakening to key concepts and ideas from related fields such as political economy analysis, complex adaptive systems and naturalistic decision-making (e.g. Tanner & Allouche, 2011; Fritz, et al., 2009; O'Hara, 2012; Ramalingham & Jones, 2008; Long & van der Ploeg, 1989). Together, they provides valuable evidence in justifying the inadequacy of current decision-making processes in responding to complex situations, onto which future uncertainties of climate change are added (Jones et al, 2011). Yet the primary barriers to a flexible forward-looking approach are still unclear, and questions remain regarding how these obstacles can be practically overcome.

In recognising the close links between adaptation and development, this paper focuses on one particular aspect of adaptive capacity: Flexible and Forward-looking Decision-Making (FFDM). Seeking practical examples, this paper explores institutional and sociopolitical barriers to FFDM in district development plans across three sites in Mozambique, Uganda and Ethiopia. Specifically, the paper adopts a problem-driven political economy analysis (PEA) to identify the processes, challenges and entry points for adaptation, and development policy and programming at the all levels. It builds on insights from three separate PEA studies conducted in a single district from each of the three countries. Finally, it proposes a number of opportunities and entry points in overcoming political and economic barriers, and encouraging support for the principles of FFDM and adaptation at the local level.



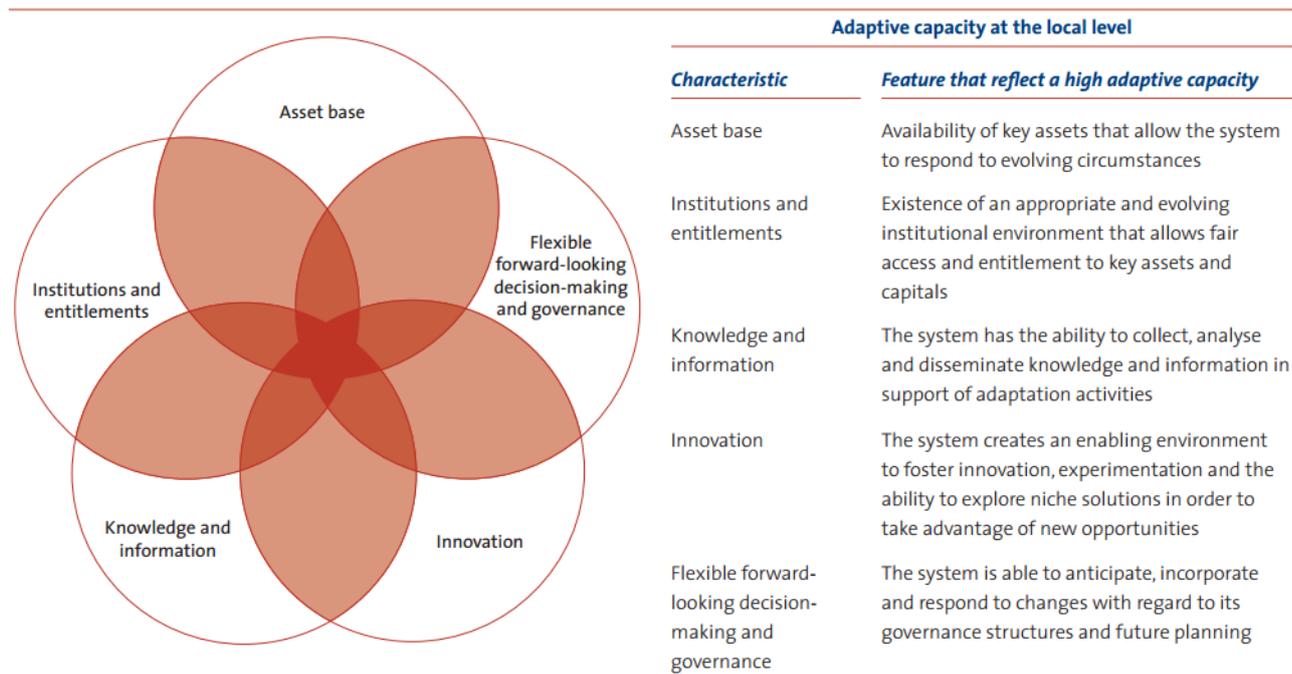
## 2. Methods, Scope and Background

**THE FINDINGS DESCRIBED** in this paper are highlights from research outputs from Phases 1 and 2 of a multi-year research and capacity-building consortium, the Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA). The paper brings together key learning and developments from ACCRA's research outputs, reflecting on the impacts of development interventions on adaptive capacity and entry points for promoting FFDM within local governance structures<sup>1</sup>.

## 2.1. The Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA)

The Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA) is an alliance of five development partners: Oxfam GB, ODI, Care International, Save the Children and World Vision International. It was established in 2009 with the aim of understanding how development interventions contribute to adaptive capacity at the community and household level (both positively and negatively). Through its first (2009-2011) and second (2011-2013) phases, ACCRA has focused on the impacts of both NGO interventions and district government planning respectively on adaptive capacity. Operating across three countries (Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda), the consortium conducted research across numerous research sites. To understand barriers and opportunities to promoting adaptive capacity, the research developed and applied the Local Adaptive Capacity framework (LAC) which describes five 'characteristics of adaptive capacity' (for more see Jones et al., 2010a, and Figure 1). The framework was applied to each of the country contexts as a set of lenses through which to assess the impacts of development interventions on adaptive capacity.

**Figure 1. The Local Adaptive Capacity framework**



Source: Jones et al., 2010

In its simplest terms FFDM is defined as being: "Able to anticipate, incorporate and respond to changes with regards to governance, structure and future planning" (Levine et al., 2011). Given the Principles in Appendix A and the discussion above, a key characteristic of complexity-inspired FFDM is that it does not base its decisions solely on evidence from the past, nor just on extant capabilities and structures, but on consideration of possible futures.

<sup>1</sup> Given the diversity of research outputs, this paper presents only common findings across each of the three ACCRA countries (from two phases of research). For more specific details and country outputs relating to ACCRA see: <http://community.eldis.org/.59d66929/>

The essence then of FFDM for adaptation is the shared act of exploring potential future interactions and working out how the consequences – arising from a range of challenging possible futures – might be addressed (see Jones et al., 2013 for more on the principles of FFDM). This means that people have to be able to appreciate the variety of levels and timescales over which adaptation has to occur, and to identify for themselves what their contributions/interactions with other actors might have to be. It is not about only about making plans, as we know they rarely match to the changing realities of the future, nor is it about documenting 'optimum' change processes, as we know that we will still have to deal with unexpected things and so will always be 'playing catch up'. Instead, it is about exploring possible futures and using this ongoing exploration to identify the enablers, tensions and blockers to adaptation that need to be addressed if people are to acquire the appropriate CCA stance and the capabilities needed to work with change to make the best of it in a real-world context (see Box 1).

### Box 1: Understanding Flexible and Forward-Looking Decision Making

Decision-making processes are flexible and forward looking when they are:

- open to the possibilities of unexpected change over different levels or scale and emanating from a variety of processes – and interaction of different processes – in various spheres, e.g. economic, environmental, demographic, political
- able to reason about future possibilities and the types of novel change which may occur from any perspective or point of view as necessary, given certain contexts
- able to appreciate how to change, given the circumstances, in ways that drive along or respond to the ongoing events. In addition, how to have the necessary 'complexity-worthy' capabilities available to enable this to happen
- 'objective' enough to understand what might constitute 'appropriate' change, given the dynamic circumstances of CCA's contextual complexity and the limits of observability, knowability and predictability of 'super-wicked'<sup>2</sup> challenges
- able to 'intervene' effectively – i.e. able to engage with, influence and shape internal dynamics by working with those best placed to support successful change

*Source: Adapted and expanded from Jones et al., 2013*

The importance of FFDM is crucial to adaptive capacity, as governance processes that are flexible, collaborative and learning based are considered better able to cope with evolving circumstances (Jones et al., 2010a). This recognises the importance of dynamic organisations, and the institutions, entitlements and assets they control in response to shock and changing trends (Smith et al., 2003). Moreover, decision-making systems can gain from being flexible enough to include new information and knowledge regarding changing environmental, social and political conditions.

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<sup>2</sup> Complexity science (e.g. Rittel and Webber, 1973) defines 'wicked problems' as those with (a) interdependent 'solutions' and 'problems' which cannot be broken down into separate parts, (b) a range of involved stakeholders that have radically different world views and different ways of understanding the issue, and therefore different (complementary, contradictory, mutually excluding) solutions, and (c) constraints that the problem is subject to and the resources needed, change dynamically over time. The problem is therefore never solved definitely. Climate change is an example of a 'super-wicked' problem (Levin et al., 2009) with the following additional features: (d) time is running out and yet, for expediency, people feel driven to adopt short-term solutions, (e) there is no single central authority with the power to 'solve' it, and (f) those seeking to solve the problem are also causing it.

Supporting the capacities of formal organisations to deal with a range of shocks and trends, and to coordinate response options, may help to ensure that communities deal better with the impacts of climate change and wider development pressures (Tompkins & Adger, 2004). An important part of this is ensuring that such organisations learn and are forward-looking in nature, anticipate future weaknesses and vulnerabilities and create opportunities for appropriate adaptive actions. Taking a longer-term approach within governance and decision making is crucial in order to prevent maladaptive interventions (Ayers & Huq, 2009).

Any analysis of governance must therefore look both at the ‘technical’ capacity of institutions, and the power relations behind decision making. The decisions that are made are usually less about the ‘technical’ features of decision-making forums, and far more about whose voice is heard, and whose interests count. Various power imbalances exist in all societies – e.g. between rich and poor, men and women, old and young, urban and rural populations or different livelihood groups. How these imbalances are reflected in any specific society will influence the capacity of individuals to adapt to changing shocks and trends (Jones et al., 2010b). The LAC does not itself provide a tool for analysing power, accountability or responsiveness of governance structures, but the framework makes space for such analysis to be included in an overall analysis of adaptive capacity.

## 2.2 The ACCRA approach and research

During the first Phase of ACCRA research, two or three research sites were identified in each country. Sites were chosen to represent different livelihoods, different agro-ecological characteristics, and different types of project intervention, including: disaster risk reduction, social protection and livelihood support programmes. Following the development of the programme’s conceptual framework and research guidance, the in-country research began with an inception workshop, bringing together experts from academia, government, civil society and NGOs to discuss the LAC framework and adapt it to the national context. This was followed by the development and testing of the research protocol; analysis of available secondary data; an intensive period of fieldwork in the research sites (2009-2011); data analysis; and the production of site reports (for full details see Levine et al., 2012a).

The second Phase of ACCRA’s research focused on district government planning. More specifically, this was about understanding key political and social drivers behind decision making in district governance; assessing the extent to which district planning is flexible and forward looking; and identifying key barriers and opportunities to FFDM within district government (see Jones et al., 2012). Working in the same three countries, the research focused instead on a single district in each: Gemechis in Ethiopia, Guijá in Mozambique, and Kotido in Uganda.

The research in this phase used a similar mixed method approach to the first phase. In addition, researchers applied a problem-driven political economy framework to assess institutional and sociopolitical drivers (adapted and expanded from Fritz et al., 2009). The analysis was based on an extensive literature review, supported by in-country semi-structured key informant interviews from various stakeholders involved in decision making at both district and national levels (n=55). Care was taken to include perspectives from across district and national government, INGO and civil society. The adapted political economy framework was then used to interpret and identify the various structural and institutional variables, key actors/stakeholders, and outcomes. For a detailed description of socioeconomic profiles of ACCRA countries and sites, see Annex A.

For the purposes of this paper, research outputs are used from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of ACCRA research. This allows for an overall synthesis of common findings that relate to the extent to which FFDM processes are imbedded within both NGO and district government actors across the three countries. Though findings are somewhat generic, the synthesis allows for the identification of key barriers and opportunities in working towards more effective support for

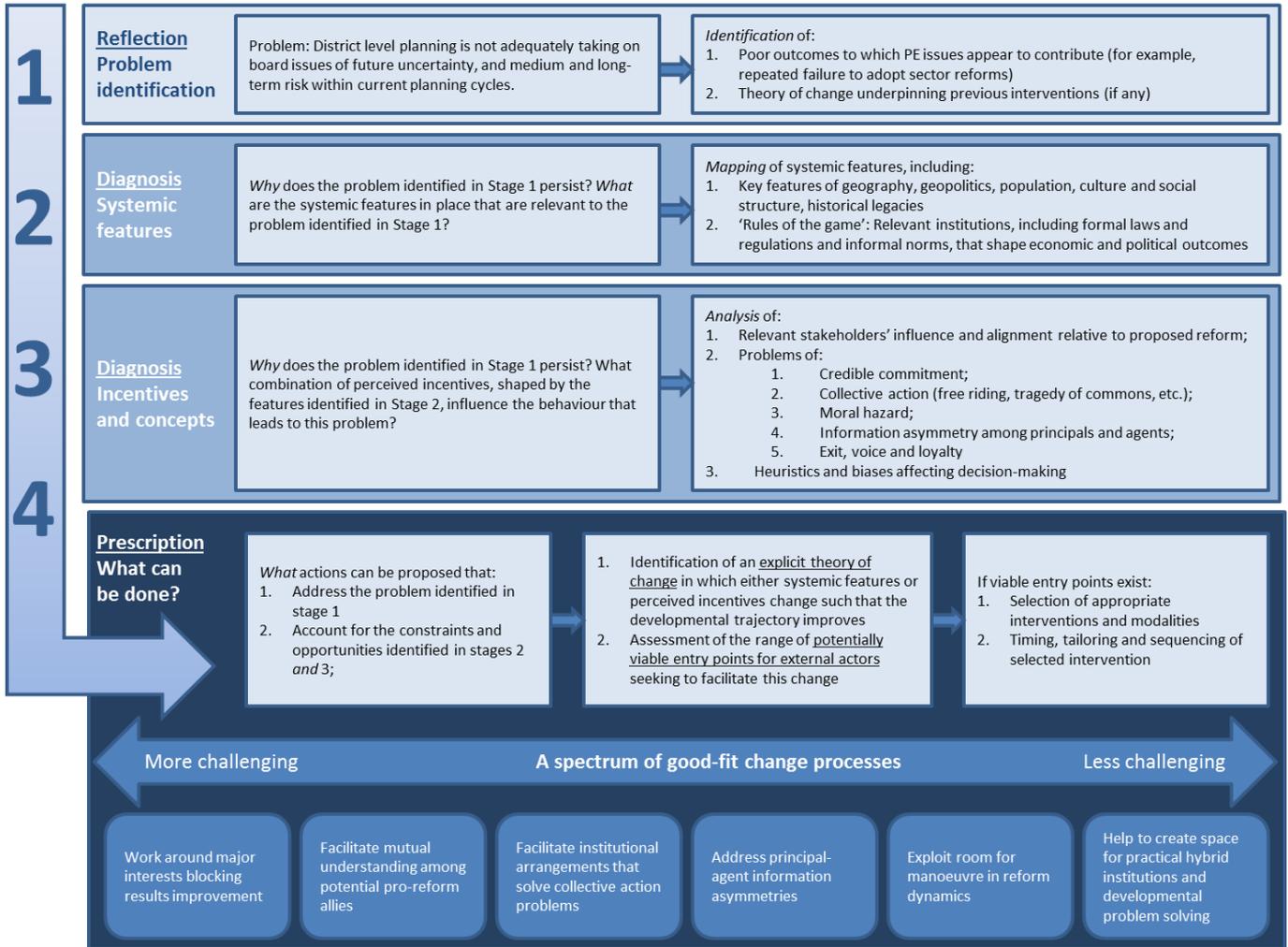
adaptation and delivery of FFDM principles across not only the three country contexts aspects of the development sector at large

### **2.3 A Political Economy perspective**

In this paper, a political economy framework is used to understand the barriers to forward-looking governance in development policy and programming across scales. The analysis focuses on key drivers – structural, institutional, and actors/stakeholders – of policy and programming that influence district level development planning and the outcomes.

Political economy analysis (PEA) is the process of understanding the interaction of political and economic processes in a society. The focus is on understanding how ideas, power and resources are distributed and contested in different contexts, by different groups at different scales, and the implications for development outcomes (Harris, et al., 2011; Tanner & Allouche, 2011). The approach aims to get beneath the formal structures (i.e. what happens on paper) to reveal the underlying incentives and institutions that enable or frustrate change (i.e. what happens in practice) (DFID, 2009). In the context of governance, this provides a useful approach for identifying and executing feasible policy and programming within institutional and governance constraints (Fritz, et al., 2009). Specifically a problem-driven PEA approach (see Figure 2 and Annex B) identifies the processes, challenges and barriers for specific policy issues – such as climate change adaptation – in a bid to identify useful entry points and pathways to successful development interventions (Fritz, et al., 2009; DFID, 2009).

**Figure 2. Steps taken using a problem-driven political economy framework**



Source: Adapted and expanded from Harris (unpublished)

sectors  
• by sharing skills and capabilities

share and re-allocate assets / capabilities, by ...

commercialisation skills  
• employing capabilities available at any level, including via market linkages

• building on information and experience-sharing  
• being open about availability and utility of assets

4

Why should we share?

Peoples attitudes  
- Own planning

We should improve ourselves!

The main challenge is implementation of Flexibilise Development in blocks; look at resource allocation and availability.

- Capacity Building for LGS & NGOs & Communities (LLGs, HLGs, Institutions)  
→ Sensitization/protecting of Environment & Natural Resources  
- NEED FOR DATA COLLECTION

Need for Resources flexibility to achieve the Development. Need to expand these kind of training to even grass root levels if we all have to benefit internally & devt.

Questions:  
- How do we think of diversity planning when we don't have funds?  
- How will government handle losses of Karamoja when most country may say that they can't wait for Karamoja to develop?

ISSUES (APPROACH)

Can this (this) type of workshop be conducted between central govt sectors / ministries / legislative / parliamentary members?

→ CAN WE USE THIS GAME FOR PLANNING PURPOSES AND ILLUSTRATION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PROJECTS/INTERVENTIONS IN GOVERNMENT AND PARTNERS?  
→ WHAT WAS THE CRITERIA OF AWARDED DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND ADDITIONAL CARDS FOR INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS?

How can we minimize disaster preparedness help govt LGS to generate emergency plans?

Lobbying through Local Council for government to pass legislation that Affirmative Actions to financially prone districts in Uganda especially those with low revenue base

# APPROPRIATE WAYS OF WORKING CREATIVE THINKING



- Any Success story/ other Countries?

The time frame is for the training. It for more time at least one week to participants grasp the well.

After Capacity building how is it to expose stakeholders Partners

## LEADERSHIP ... COURAGE APPROPRIATE TOOLS

GROUP PROP  
IDEA-SPLIT  
TIME  
BEST + MOST  
FEASIBLE/  
PRACTICAL

OSALS  
→ WHAT IT IS  
→ BENEFITS

How are others going to get these similar knowledge?

Ask a sugger Question... How do we as interventions which kinds should we

### 3. FFDM in development policy and planning

**BEFORE DELVING INTO** any diagnosis of the development policy and planning, two important points need further clarification.

Firstly, it is important to recognise the heterogeneity of the development sector as a whole. The ‘development sector’ is frequently referred to, yet lacks a universally accepted definition. It is largely used as an umbrella term, depicting any activity or actor involved in the delivery of international development. The sector is typically associated with the activities of international and local NGOs, civil society groups, multilateral organisations – e.g. the UN or World Bank – academic institutions, government, and private sector bodies working on ‘development’.

Portraying all of the diverse definitions and conceptualisations of development and the development sector is a challenge larger than the scope of this paper (for a useful commentary see Landivar et al., 2012). Rather, we shall refer to the sector as the domain and/or sub-discipline of development organisations and government ministries working towards positive change in the social conditions that create poverty and inequality, and allow people to achieve their human potential (Bovil 2009). In the context of ACCRA’s research, this largely encompasses the government (both district and central), NGOs (both international and national), and civil society groups that have presence and influence within the research sites. More importantly is an appreciation of the diversity of working practices, institutional setups and incentives. Thus, any synthesis of key barriers and opportunities affecting the sector has to take into account the various generalisations and specificities that apply, particularly at the local level. Despite this, many commonalities can be drawn between the interactions of different actors, reflecting many of the symptoms and structures of the sector as a whole.

Secondly, it is important to observe the strong links between climate change adaptation and development, both conceptually and in practice. The push to support developing countries and communities in adapting to climate change has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years. Interventions that facilitate adaptation vary considerably in breadth, scope and appearance. Conceptually it is useful to distinguish between two distinct approaches (McGray et al., 2007). At one end of the spectrum are responses to direct impacts of climate change, such as reducing the size of lakes prone to Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods (GLOFs) or erecting coastal embankments in areas threatened by rising sea levels. These impact-centric options tend to approach adaptation as distinct from, and additional to, ‘conventional’ development – although the concept of additionality in relation to adaptation has proven both technically and conceptually difficult to demonstrate, and has been widely criticised (Brown and Kaur, 2009).

At the other end of the spectrum, adaptation can be approached as an integral part of ‘good development’. The premise here is that addressing the underlying drivers of poverty and vulnerability will help people and communities to respond to changing shocks and trends more generally, including climate change (Riché et al., 2009; Bapna & McGray, 2008). With this in mind, development activities – such as DRR, social protection, or sustainable livelihood interventions – can be seen to promote various aspects of adaptive capacity (see Levine et al., 2011). Ensuring that development activities are able to respond to change and uncertainty – to evolving climate and development pressures – is therefore crucial in sustaining adaptation and supporting people’s adaptive capacity at the local level (Pahl-Wostl 2009; Brooks et al., 2011). Development planning is at the heart of this need (given its influence on the range of development activities that take place on the ground) and thus the main area of interest in this study.

### **3.1 The current state of play: How are development actors adapting to change and uncertainty?**

Despite its heterogeneity, it is possible to draw certain commonalities across structures of governance, management and incentivisation within the development sector. The sector has long been criticised for an emphasis on short-termism and rigidity within its operational outlook (Stubbs, 2003; Clark, 2011). Reasons for this are numerous, and by no means solely attributable to the

actions and incentives of development implementers, i.e. those tasked with delivering programmes on the ground. In fact, though unpacking underlying drivers behind the rigid nature of development planning, it is important to look at the system as a whole as well as the interest, motivations and incentives of the actors that shape it.

Research from ACCRA's Phase 1 evaluates the impact of development interventions (both INGOs and government) across 11 separate sites across Uganda, Ethiopia and Mozambique (see Levine et al., 2011a). Findings highlight how longer-term objectives and future trends are rarely holistically integrated into the planning cycles of many of the documented INGOs' operations at the project level. Even rarer is the effective inclusion of proponents of FFDM within Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and appraisal systems – crucial in incentivising for action (Brooks et al., 2011). Though there are numerous factors at play, part of this can be attributed to the pressures placed on 'traditional' development funders (i.e. external public donors, and to some extent developing country governments) to be held to account for their deliverables by civil society. Issues of value for money, effectiveness of delivery, and results are seen as key measures of success. This can skew the agenda towards the delivery of short-term outputs – preferably tangible and easily quantifiable ones – ahead of strengthening or creating effective processes and institutions needed to deliver development objectives in the face of uncertainty and/or longer-term change, which is often far harder to achieve and measure (Viravaidya & Hayssen, 2001). Inevitably, the length of these planning horizons, and how they are evaluated for 'success', have a significant impact on how programmatic operations of development interventions are carried out (Sridhar, 2010). Unpacking the implications of these factors, and other political and economic drivers as they trickle down to the project level, is explored in greater depth in sections 4 and 5.

Despite these criticisms, there are increasing calls for a shift in sector-wide practices. For example, the Accra Agenda for Action, subscribed to in 2008 by major donors and developing countries alike, calls for flexible, rapid and long-term funding modalities to bridge humanitarian response, recovery and longer-term development (Groff, 2011). To a large extent a discernible shift in greater coordination, collaboration and longer-term strategic thinking can be seen within many of the larger development actors by bringing the humanitarian and developmental departments within agencies closer together, but also between development partners, particularly at the programmatic level, and with growing emphasis on a 'resilience' agenda (EC, 2012). In this sense, the same is generally true for developing country governments as it is for INGO, civil society operations and UN agencies. Moreover, the emergence of 'non-traditional' donors, e.g. the Gates Foundation, and other significant philanthropic funders, has signalled a move towards greater risk taking and longer-term investments, with "the expectation that results will take more time than the other donors can allow" (Sridhar, 2010, 5).

Though advances are evident, a large portion of project-level decision making and delivery within the sector remains rooted in 3- to 5-year cycles and heavily influenced by Logical Framework-type approaches (Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005; ECODE, 2011). In the context of national government planning and priority-setting in ACCRA's three focal countries (Mozambique, Ethiopia and Uganda), activities typically operate on 3- to 5-year planning cycles, with annual cyclical reviews. Financial support is often targeted towards priority areas, such as investments in infrastructure, agriculture, education and health, often limiting the availability of financial and technical resources for investing in other areas. It also results in an incentive structure that can limit the incentivisation of principles of FFDM and monitoring amongst stratified levels of government (see Section 4 for details).

### **3.2 A snapshot of development planning at the sub-national level**

Moving to a focus on ACCRA's three research sites, the main instruments for development planning and governance at the local level are seen in the form of District Development Plans

(DDPs)<sup>3</sup>. DDPs form the mainstay of many planning procedures of local government across East and Southern Africa, and are meant to guide the priorities and actions of all development actors operating within the district (whether NGO, private sector or government) through a 5-year planning cycle. With this in mind, they form the heart of the analysis of this paper.

Coordinated and led by district governments, DDPs are closely aligned to a National Development Plan. These lay out an overarching set of activities and targets for the country as a whole (in some cases regional/provincial plans also act as an intermediary). National Development Plans are also focused around 5-year cycles in all three ACCRA countries. They outline processes for structural transformation, often aimed at achieving a pre-defined rate of economic growth, and focusing on investments and interventions towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. These require key development sectors and financial planning for various planning levels, which provide the mechanism to link – in principle – district and national development activities.

Although DPPs operate on a 3- to 5-year planning cycle, district governments also carry out annual monitoring and budgetary reviews. In Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda the process of identifying and prioritising district needs is, in theory, largely decentralised (see Box 2 for the planning process in Mozambique). On paper, development needs should be first identified at the community level and filtered up (i.e. in a bottom-up manner) to district-level government whereby priorities are aligned to available budgetary resources. Development of DPPs is thus meant to be highly participatory, involving a wide range of local stakeholders outside the district government. In practice, however, this process rarely materialises (explored in greater depth in Section 4)

### Box 2. Procedural steps in the development of district development planning in Mozambique

Development plans for each district in Mozambique are reviewed on a 5-year cycle. Operational social and economic plans are aligned to district budgets (known as PESOD) and are formed annually.

The planning follows a 5-step process consisting of:

**Community participation:** Considered a pre-condition for subsequent work, consisting of local community engagement

**Strategic planning:** Provides the opportunity for district planning to assess and prioritise community- led planning ideas in accordance with district financing and resources

**Operational planning:** At this stage the development plan has already been approved and can be formulated into a plan of operation (PESOD), which is done on an annual basis

**Execution, management:** Subsequently, the plan's execution is managed at the district level as per the PESOD.

**External Control:** Monitoring and evaluation

*Source: Artur et al., 2013*

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<sup>3</sup> Each country has different structural segregations for sub-national planning. E.g. in Ethiopia they are present in the form of Regional and Woreda (similar to a district) Development Plans; Mozambique has Provincial and District Strategic Development Plans; and Uganda has District Development Plans.. In this paper these lower levels of aggregated planning procedures will be referred to as District Development Plans.

### 3.3 Other key players in district governance

While DDPs are coordinated and led by district governments, a number of other actors play a significant role in influencing local decision-making (though to varying degrees in each ACCRA country). At a higher level, a number of central ministries hold a substantial degree of influence over district prioritisation and activity-setting in each of the three countries. In particular, actors such as the Ministries of Finance (or equivalent) largely dictate the allocation and designation of development funding streams at local level. Ministries of Planning (or equivalent) are also important and often responsible for setting the parameters of national and sub-national planning cycles, the role of which is further explored in Sections 4 and 5.

In addition to central government, a number of external actors exert a considerable degree of influence on local governance processes. International donors, multilateral institutes, INGOs and other aid agencies each contribute significantly to both national/district development budgets and delivery development activities in each of the three study countries. In the case of Uganda, up to 30% of the national budget comes from donor sources (Muhumuza & Jones, 2013). Specifically, NGOs are heavily relied upon to fill the service and funding gaps left by district governments due to resource and capacity constraints (Muhumuza, 2010). This allows for considerable lobbying and the potential to influence planning processes at all scales of governance. Mozambique has been heavily dependent on donor assistance for more than 30 years, with up to 45% of the national budget derived from donor support. In 2005, roughly 23 bilateral agencies, 23 multilateral institutions and an estimated 150 non-governmental organizations provided development assistance within Mozambique (Artur et al., 2013).

Civil society actors do (at least on paper) also have an influence on district governance. Formal groups such as local NGOs, religious groups, private sector bodies and technical committees are each included in the discussions over DDP development and annual reviews. More important, perhaps, are other informal institutions and historical influences. Religious or faith-based ideals and ethnic/tribal interactions have an influence in shaping norms and values. Many of these factors are, somewhat inevitably, a source of conflict and tension. Historical legacies can also be particularly pertinent. For example, the Karamoja sub-region of Uganda has experienced continual external influence and political neglect – a legacy of colonial interference that has remained within successive national governments (Muhumuza, 2012; Mamdani, 1982). Such issues of regional neglect and political discrimination have significant impacts on how planning is conducted, notably how it is funded and who decides on prioritisation of spending (as discussed in Sections 4 and 5).



## 4. Findings and Analysis

**THOUGH CLEAR CONTEXTUAL** differences are apparent, ACCRA's research points to a number of barriers within local governance structures in adhering to principles of FFDM across the three research sites<sup>4</sup>. Findings showcase the relative rigidity of planning processes and challenges in dealing with change and uncertainty at the district level. Below is a synthesis of key institutional and sociopolitical barriers to FFDM within district governance, assembled from across the three country studies.

#### 4.1 Barriers to FFDM within district governance and planning at local level

In analysing findings from the three districts, three common obstacles to FFDM are identified:

**i) The top-down nature of prioritisation and spending.** Each of the districts profiled in ACCRA's research exhibits a notable lack of agency in the ability of district-level actors (government and others) to identify their own priorities and allocate spending according to the specific needs of the district. Though in theory decentralisation is promoted in each of the three countries, in practice, many decisions relating to financial allocation and designation of key activities are prescribed from central government (notably from Ministries dealing with Finance and Planning issues).

For example, national (and by association, district) spending in Uganda is designated through the framework of its five 'national priority programme areas', namely roads, water, health, education and agriculture. This sectoral allocation of resources (of which district spending is limited to these five areas) has largely discouraged opportunities for multidisciplinary action, reinforced project structures, and meant that sectors outside of the five priorities are frequently missed out (Blomley et al., 2004). It also means that if there are particular activities that are specific to Kotido's needs and require immediate attention outside of national priorities, such as drought management schemes or awareness-raising of DRR practices, then funding is difficult to ascribe.

There are provisions to allow for spending to go towards district-identified priorities. However resources for this can only come from revenue raised within the district itself (i.e. through taxation of private sector activities). Unsurprisingly, in a relatively isolated and under-developed district like Kotido, revenue is all but non-existent. In addition, local governments have to provide contributions from local revenue in order to secure central government funds. Should a district have difficulties in raising such funds – or decided to spend locally raised revenues different – centrally allocated funds could be withdrawn. Though specific policies and structures differ in relation to the Ethiopian and Mozambique contexts, both research sites refer to very similar issues of constraints in relation to budget and priority settings, as well as the top-down nature of planning from both central and regional/provincial government.

In Ethiopia the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), a medium-term strategic framework for the period from 2010-11 to 2014-15, is very comprehensive and consists of detailed and ambitious targets for each sector. The GTP is intended to maintain at least an average real GDP growth rate of 11% and meet the Millennium Development Goals (MoFED, 2010). Woreda development plans are prepared in line with the national plan that largely defines which priorities are set. Local communities complained that they have other priorities than those specified in the Woreda Development Plan. These require immediate intervention although most of the activities planned and carried out are also important to address their problems. For instance, water development for both household use and irrigation has been mentioned as a key issue by communities and put on top of their development agenda. However, watershed management through the construction of physical conservation structures, and tree planting and yield gains through increased input use, have been among the major activities that received prior attention in the last three consecutive annual plans of the Woreda (Amsalu & Ludi, 2012). In Mozambique, a long history of centralised

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<sup>4</sup> For more detailed ACCRA assessments of district government and country reports: Artur et al., 2013 (Mozambique); Amsalu & Ludi, 2013 (Ethiopia); Muhumuza & Jones, 2013 (Uganda).

decision making means that local priority setting is somewhat limited. Technical and finance resources are provided from central/upper government with research respondents noting minimal practical involvement on local-level actors in the core planning process. This has, to some extent, discouraged local participation in the development process.

This lack of agency and flexibility in allowing district governments to identify, allocate and act on its own development needs is of key relevance to FFDM. For one, the rigidity of prioritisation and budgetary procedures mean that there is very little scope for changes in the delivery of district activities. If new approaches or priorities are needed – owing to a sudden shock (like flooding) or gradual stress (like shifting patterns of rainfall) – then limited opportunities exist in adapting DDP activities accordingly. This is particularly problematic for issues relating to climate change and resilience, given their cross-sectoral nature, and therefore do not fit directly into the national priority areas. In all three districts, resources available in addressing climate change and DRR within the delivery of district planning were scant, often left to district officials to coordinate and act on them through their own private initiatives trying to mobilise NGOs to step in (and with no central technical support).

**ii) Lack of district agency and ownership in responding to change and uncertainty.** Related to the centralised and top-down nature of planning and spending, a key barrier to FFDM at the district level is a lack of ownership and responsibility in dealing with shocks and stresses. This point is reinforced by the notion that planning at the local level is very much done on the basis of a ‘normal year’. In each of the three countries, district level respondents describe how targets and objectives for district activities and spending are prescribed on the premise that there is unlikely to be any unexpected shocks or stresses that may affect the delivery of development at the district level. Rarely are future changes (both in the short term and long term) considered in either five-year planning cycles or annual review cycles. The rigidity of the planning process and its structures can largely be attributed to the design of national planning process, and the failure of central government to allow for flexibility to be built into it.

Though district governments are encouraged to develop their own contingency plans (to be coordinated in conjunction with all district actors such as NGOs and other civil society groups), they are rarely provided with the financial and technical resources to develop the plans effectively. Even when relatively comprehensive plans have been developed – as with the case of Kotido – seldom are they implemented on the ground. With no centrally allocated funding available to enact district contingency plans (and responsibility for actions held with central government and NGO partners), district government is left with little in the way of agency or incentives to actively pursue principles of FFDM.

Related to this, national planning procedures often dictate that, should districts experience an emergency for which they are unaccustomed to and ill-prepared (such as a hydro-meteorological or geophysical hazard, or a food security emergency), primary channelling of external financial resources and technical support are to be delivered through central government. Though in many ways, central-led action is required to deliver the scale of recovery efforts, key informants note that, in effect, such actions often bypass district-level actors and absolve much of the local responsibility and ownership in dealing with the situation on the ground. It is also worth noting that emergencies and crises can also be used as an excuse in justifying missing targets. Similarly, the practices of many of the INGOs operating in the three ACCRA districts only serve to reinforce the dilemma, as the generation of external funding during a time of crisis typically bypasses district government activities. In the case of Kotido (Uganda), the district’s Chief Administrative Officer, with overall responsibility for developing and implementing the DDP, acknowledged that district government is relatively powerless in times of crisis, having to accept any external support available with little control and input in coordinating the various interventions, whether or not they are in line with a district’s disaster contingency planning.

Ethiopia differs slightly as it has an extensive history of dealing with emergencies. Here, systems are well established, whereby Woreda Early Warning Committees carry out assessments four

times a year to assess, among other things, crop performance, livestock condition, market situation, water availability in springs and rainfall patterns. The committee devises mechanisms, but rarely act upon them, to reduce the adverse effects of an imminent disaster, if that is within its own capacity, or report to the Zone and regional government for more serious events when the scale of the problem requires external assistance and intervention (Amsalu & Ludi, 2013).

**iii) Lack of awareness and incentives for action on adaptation, DRR and FFDM.** Perhaps the largest political economy barrier can be seen in the lack of incentives and motivation for district government to act on issues of FFDM within DDPs and other district planning processes. Not only is the structure of planning cycles rigid (meaning that districts only receive spending for certain activities and plan for 'business-as-usual'), but issues of adaptation, DRR or FFDM are not included in the evaluation of a district's 'success' in delivering on targets.

Unsurprisingly, district governments in each of the three countries are appraised against central priorities, often on core activities such as numbers of schools built, roads paved, or primary school children enrolled. This is further enhanced by a development planning system and performance criteria that concentrate on outputs instead of outcomes, a strong culture of sectoral working, and lacking incentives to be responsible for achieving outcomes or impacts. Given the cross-sectoral and often intangible nature of promoting adaptive capacity or supporting DRR activities, key indicators of FFDM are not included in M&E and performance assessment criteria. Moreover, in recognising existing constraints on financial and technical resources in each of the three district governments, support for the principles of adaptation and FFDM is not a priority and does little to encourage key actors (such as the chief administrative officer or the Woreda chairman) to take them forward within district planning.

Related to this is a lack of awareness in the use and the potential benefits of FFDM amongst local actors. Though issues of adaptation and DRR are familiar to most district officials, many express uncertainties in knowing how the concepts could be embedded into ongoing development activities, and remain sceptical as to the overall benefits of ex-ante action. Indeed, most issues relating to adaptation and DRR are delegated to relatively junior members of government staff, and are rarely considered of key importance amongst the main decision makers. A lack of technical capacity and competing priorities for resources are partly to blame. However, as described in above, the primary barrier lays in the design of the system as a whole, and the structures, incentives and sociopolitical motives that shape the interactions between central government and district level actors.



## 5. Routes forward in promoting adaptive capacity through FFDM

**DESPITE THE CLEAR** influence of institutional and sociopolitical barriers in all three ACCRA sites, there are areas that can present entry points for promoting FFDM. Building on findings from the two phases of ACCRA's research, we propose four opportunities. These reflect routes forward in attempting to promote adaptive capacity through FFDM at the local level. How these four opportunities are enacted in practice may vary considerably, and will depend on the context. They are not meant as comprehensive solutions, but offer a useful and applicable starting point in efforts to deliver successful and sustainable adaptation.

## 5.1 Raising awareness of the benefits of long-term action and planning at the district level

At present, district-level planning in each of the three study sites operates on the basis of a 'normal year'. Output targets are set according to central priorities and objectives assuming that the district will not face any unforeseen hazards or circumstances. Failure to achieve targets due to such threats is not accommodated for, or used as an excuse for not achieving targets, requiring district government to commence a lengthy process of justification and reporting in the former case, as well as typically seeking external assistance from central government and NGO partners. Both planning for uncertainty and thinking in the longer term are rarely included within planning processes.

In theory, DPPs from each of ACCRA's districts, though operating on a 5-year planning cycle, work towards a longer-term 'vision' – a guiding plan that is set to mirror national vision, typically on a scale of 25 years. In this sense, objectives of current planning processes are meant to be directed by longer-term needs and timescales, and should inherently include areas of FFDM within its makeup. Yet in practice, these 'visions' act as little more than reference points, and seldom inform DDP development. In the case of Kotido for example, the 'vision' is but a few sentences; envisaging a secure and prosperous district by 2025. It offers little in the way of practical guidance, despite the tremendous potential to guide existing planning processes.

Ensuring that district officials are aware of the need for thinking in the longer term, and are aware of the opportunities that exist in being able to 'work within the system', is thus the key. Providing relevant and applicable examples, demonstrating the value added, and providing officials with the tools and capacity to do so on within their own means, will be important steps in achieving this goal.

## 5.2 Incentivising action on FFDM

The instigation of principles of FFDM within district governance will only be achieved if measures are put in place to incentivise action – and if national planning procedures and practices allow and support FFDM at multiple levels. This requires action at all levels, i.e. interventions cannot solely focus on district government if they expect meaningful and sustainable change to occur. As discussed in previous sections, the priorities and objectives of district level planning are, to a certain extent, decided upon by procedures and guidelines set at the national level. They are also strongly influenced by what district government – and in particular the chief administrator – is evaluated and appraised upon in terms of performance and success.

Part of the failure to deliver FFDM is that for key district officials who are subject to many competing priorities and deliverables, adaptive governance is not a priority, given a lack of incentives to act on it. While action to raise awareness and build capacity is important, it is unlikely to achieve sustained and meaningful change until active incentives are built into central and district evaluation processes. Encouraging central government to include more holistic and diversely targeted processes for evaluation of district performance is therefore imperative. Finding how systems of monitoring and evaluation can track and record progress in promoting FFDM will be equally important, and challenging in equal measures.

### 5.3 Providing the tools and supporting the agency of district government and development partners to plan for the future

A key aspect for promoting FFDM at district level is the need to provide appropriate support and capacity to allow local actors to plan effectively. Though district officials are typically receptive to promoting a more flexible and forward-looking approach within governance process, a typical response is one of not having the right tools, or knowing suitable planning techniques to do so. In addition, a barrier would be not having the required finances and human capacities (in the different line departments) that would allow flexible and forward-looking planning. This is an area where external support, notably through NGO and government expertise and resources, can play a key role in the provision of adequate technical resources.

However, the delivery of formal guidelines and strategy documents is hardly ever enough, nor is it commonly successful. Rarely do generic planning tools – such as how to facilitate a scenario planning exercise – succeed, largely due to a failure in appreciating the constrained decision-making environment within which governance takes place. For capacity-building tools and approaches to succeed, they have to recognise and encourage district government to work within the ‘rules of the game’, and to ‘change the rules of the game’ when and where possible. Making tools as relevant and applicable as possible to the local institutional environment is therefore key. So too is encouraging district government to realise the potential, and agency they already have available to them.

A significant barrier to local policy change is the perception that district government has neither the agency nor power to bring about change. This feeling is largely due to the influence wielded by central government, and the restrictions it imposes on those below it. Therefore, external interventions can play a strong role in supporting district government to discover the ‘wiggle room’ they might have to do things differently, build the capacity to plan for the future (e.g. knowing how to design and deliver forward-looking plans) and having the right entry points for initiating change at the system-wide level (e.g. knowing which actors to lobby within central government and other relevant organisations to bring about policy reform). In this regard, tools such as PEA can prove invaluable in identifying opportunities in engaging with suitable institutional and sociopolitical structures.

### 5.4 Building on, and strengthening existing institutions and initiatives

One of the strongest observations from ACCRA’s research is that districts are subject to a plethora of competing external interventions, whether from central government, NGO or private sector actors. Each is competing to introduce new ways of working, promote new tools, set up new institutions, or encourage district government to prioritise particular areas. The result is a near-endless chain of workshops and training days targeted at district administrators. This is, to some extent, responsible for a clear process of incentivisation presented to officials in getting them to attend, as external actors vie for their attention (e.g. workshops are not attended by relevant officials unless sufficient DSA and/or lunch is provided). It has also meant that ‘workshop fatigue’ has gradually been a tangible issue.

The common narrative for these workshops is that district officials are hosted in a meeting room, are treated to an entire day of presentations or introduced to a new framework/toolkit, and trusted to follow up and deliver on their newly skills. This model relies on very little interaction and seldom has meaningful engagement with attendees. It also often follows a top-down approach, whereby it is assumed that the tools and skills provided are of relevance to district officials’ needs (rather than being asked for by district officials themselves). In reality this model rarely succeeds. Seldom do externally introduced institutions, such as working groups, operate successfully for any length of time, nor do frameworks get adopted and applied wholeheartedly.

For an intervention looking to successfully promote an external cause requires a thorough appreciation of the sociopolitical context and understanding of the reasons for past failures in delivering capacity support. It also needs to reflect the needs and priorities of district officials, and most importantly that they feel any change in the planning process is of benefit to themselves. Seeking to build off the back of, and strengthen, existing institutions, activities and partnerships may not always be the optimum vehicle for delivering transformative change, but can often help to ensure take-up, ownership and meaningful change.

In addition, opportunities may exist in exploring new and innovative ways in sharing knowledge, and overcoming the uni-modal nature of workshop delivery for capacity building. Trialling forms of experiential learning, such as policy gaming and role play, may present a unique opportunity in promoting awareness and engaging with policy makers at the right level (Suarez et al., 2013, for an example of games applied in the context of Community Based Adaptation).



## 6. Conclusions

**A SYNTHESIS OF** ACCRA's two phases of research points to the failure of national and district development plans to account for change and uncertainty across its three country sites. Findings reveal significant institutional and sociopolitical barriers to FFDM in the delivery of District Development Plans. Though each district exhibits unique contextual differences, this paper presents a number of reasons for this failure. These include: the top-down nature of prioritisation and spending; lack of agency and ownership in delivering adaptation and DRR amongst district actors; and, perhaps most importantly, a lack of awareness and incentives for acting on the principles of FFDM at district level. Above all, it argues that rather than being attributable to a single actor, these institutional barriers are a result of the structures, incentives and sociopolitical motives that shape the system as a whole.

With this in mind, any meaningful support for adaptation has to address the complex interactions and power dynamics between central government and district level actors, as well as other relevant formal and informal institutions that influence district governance. Working with district government to better operate within the confines of national and local governance structure can only achieve so much: i.e. incremental change. Importantly, tools such as scenario planning may, where relevant, support adaptive capacity and encourage the principles of FFDM. However, to have meaningful progress in promoting FFDM will more likely require many of these underlying barriers to be addressed head on. This can only be achieved if all levels of governance are targeted and engaged: i.e. transformational change.

Crucially, institutional and sociopolitical barriers to adaptation are areas that have, as of yet, not received a large degree of attention from either academic or policy-making spheres. This omission is important, as understanding and addressing issues of political economy within the adaptation debate are key to identifying entry points for 'unblocking' many of these barriers at local level. The paper points to a number of opportunities in starting this discussion. These focus on: existing institutions and relationships; awareness raising; incentivisation; and the provision of technical support. It is hoped that the lessons from ACCRA's three research sites will resonate with other country contexts, allowing wider reflection and comparison. Indeed, only through this shared learning can meaningful and targeted action in support of adaptation be effectively scaled up and replicated across scales.

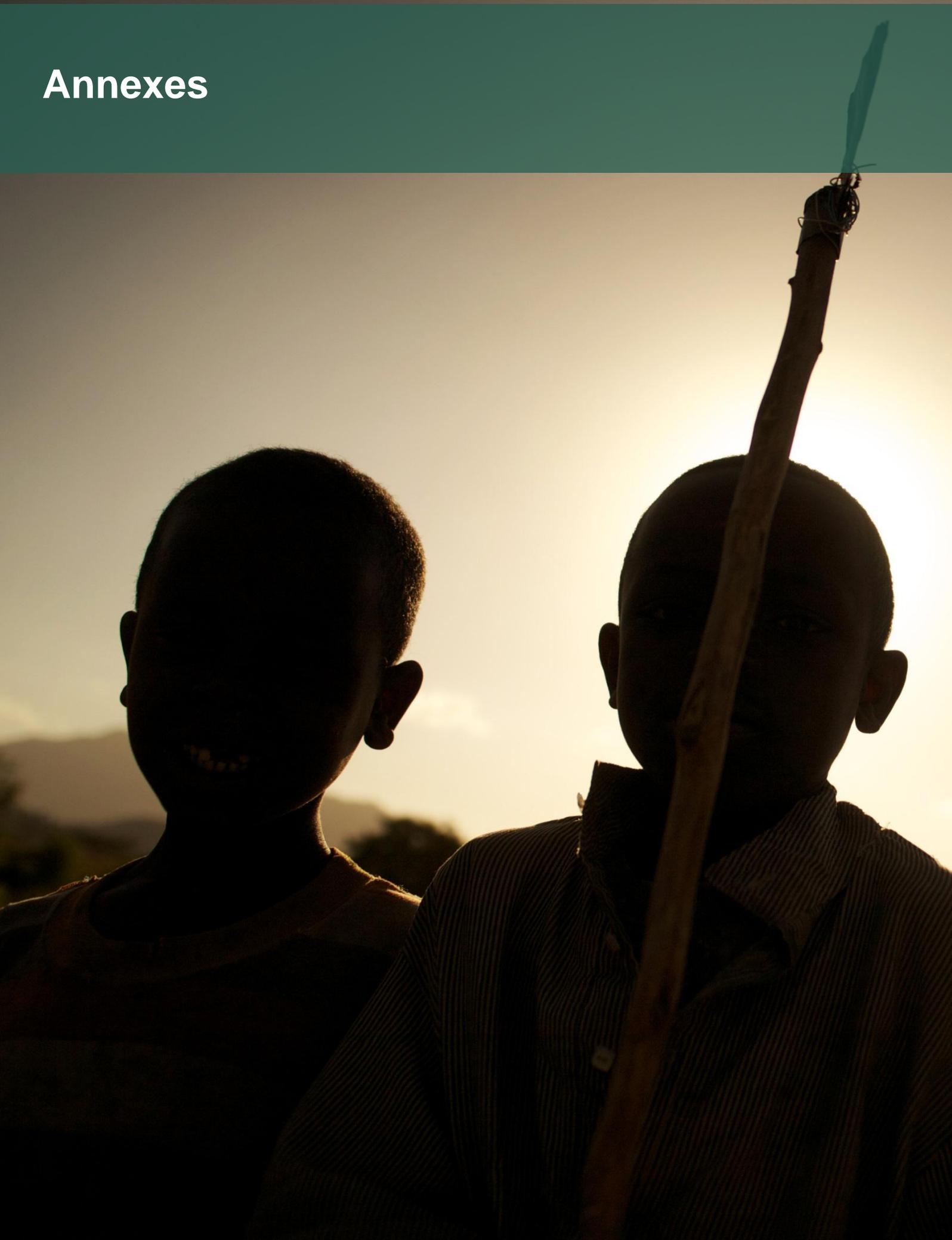
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# Annexes



## Annex A. Country contexts

### **Ethiopia:** *Gemechis district*

With over 80 million inhabitants, Ethiopia is the second-most populous country and the fifth-largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa. The Ethiopian economy has experienced strong economic growth in recent years, with real GDP growth at, or near, double-digit levels since 2003/04 which surpasses most other countries in Africa. That said, the country still has a low HDI, ranking 174<sup>th</sup> out of 187 countries.

The study in Ethiopia was conducted in the Gemechis district of West Hararghe Zone in the North East. The total population of the district is 184,032 (CSA, 2008). In Gemechis there is substantial poverty and food insecurity despite sufficient land to boost agricultural production. In part, this is attributed to water shortages and the reliance on rain-fed agriculture as the main source of livelihoods. Consequently access to water has become a source of local conflict due to increased pressure on small-scale irrigation for the cultivation of short-maturing food crops and cash crops, and water springs can be up to a three-hour journey on foot from households. Moreover, many places are not accessible due to underdeveloped road systems and public transport, which affects agriculture production and delivery of goods to market.

In Gemechis, both the highland and lowland suffer various types of climate hazards. The major potential disaster risks include variable and erratic rainfall, which disturb the normal agricultural calendar and cause outbreak of diseases and pests. This often results in crop failure which exposes households to food shortages and reduced income.

### **Mozambique:** *Guijá district, Gaza Province*

Since the early 1990s, macroeconomic reform, donor assistance and political stability in Mozambique have helped achieve rapid improvements in the country's economic growth rates, with GDP growth averaging around 7% over the last five years (WB). In spite of this progress, however, most of the population lives below the poverty line while over 80% of Mozambique's population is dependent on small-scale, rain-fed agriculture and vulnerable to the effects of climate hazards (ISDR, 2009).

The study in Mozambique took place in the district of Guijá in the Gaza Province. Gaza has an estimated population of 1.3 million, of which 75,303 inhabitants reside in Guija (IIIRGPH, 2007). Rain-fed agriculture is the economic mainstay of the district, constituting 85% of the local economy. Most of this is substance and consequently there are low food reserves for times of water scarcity and crop failures.

Guija is affected by numerous types of climate hazards including cyclones and flooding, but the district is also considered highly vulnerable to water scarcity and drought conditions. It includes one of the driest regions in the country, Pafuri, which receives average annual precipitation of 300-400mm (NAPA). The climate in Guija is semi-arid dry, with average annual temperatures ranging between 24°C and 26°C and the district is characterised by low and irregular rainfall (Administrative Post Nalazi).

### **Uganda:** *Kotido, Karamoja region*

The study in Uganda took place in the district of Kotido in the Karamoja region. Karamoja is considered one of the most underdeveloped regions of Uganda, characterised by chronic poverty

and historic marginalisation. 80% of its population experience some form of food insecurity, with food relief agencies having a long and continued history of engagement within the region; WFP is reported to have provided targeted food relief to 140,000 people in 2011<sup>5</sup>. According to the 2002 census figures, Kotido has a population of 218,500 people with very low literacy rates (12% for men, 3% for women, 4% average all adults (the national average literacy rate is 49%).

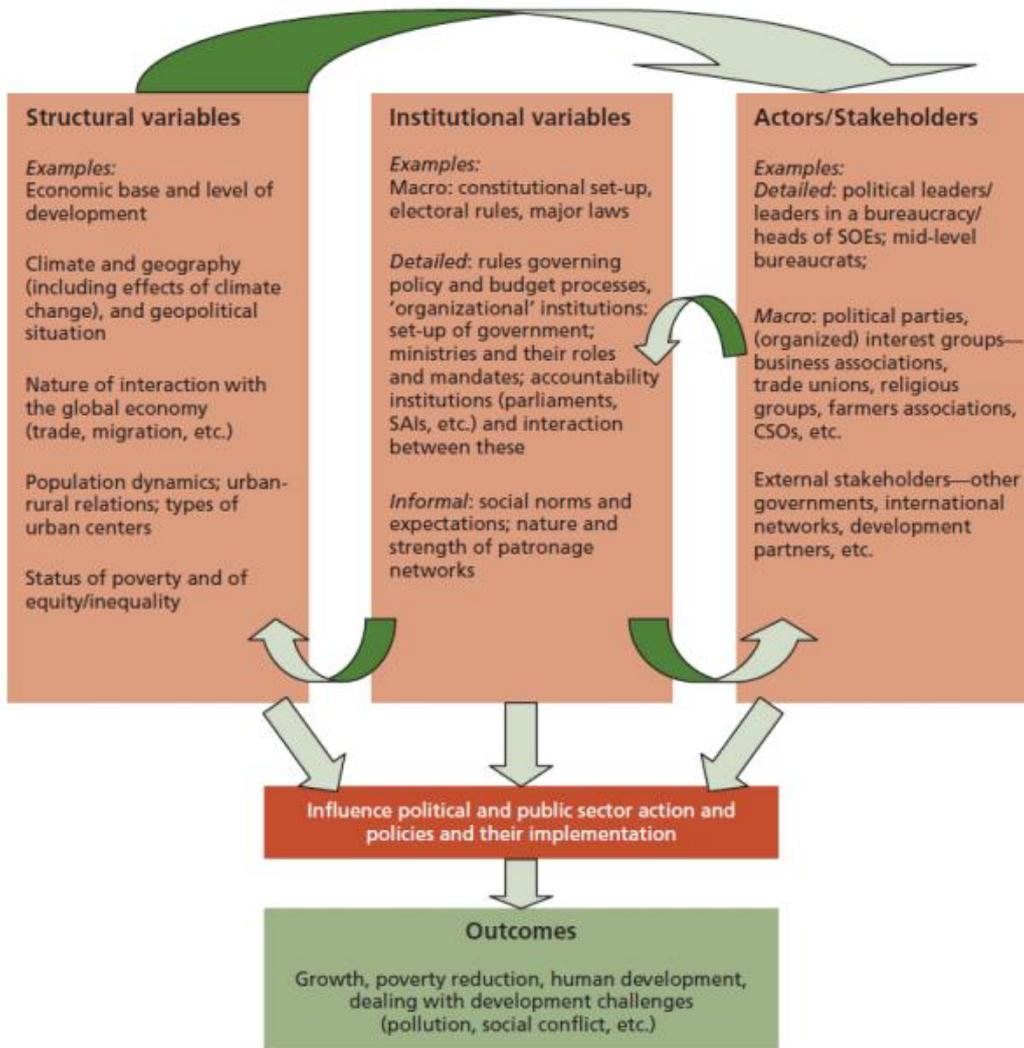
Kotido is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups including the Dodoth, Jie, Labwor and Ik. The majority of these groups engage in pastoral livelihoods, complemented in some parts by agricultural cultivation – the subject of historical focus and increasing government attention. Issues of conflict and security have a large presence throughout the district, and manifest in many different forms. One important factor is cattle raiding/rustling (armed raids in which rival clans steal cattle). Raids are conducted for various economic, social, and political reasons typically as a means to finance bridal payments (though inevitably a cycle of revenge often ensues). Frequent raids to rustle cattle occur both amongst the Karamajong and between other cross-border groups, such as the Topotha of southern Sudan and Turkana from Kenya. These events have significant impacts on the security and wellbeing of the district's inhabitants, and have long been a focus of outside attention.

The district's climate is characterised by daily temperatures ranging from 20°C to 35°C, and short rainfall (March–August) averaging 519mm per annum and a longer dry season (November–March).

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<sup>5</sup> The Republic of Uganda (2012), *Uganda Humanitarian Profile 2012*, Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Kampala.

## Annex B. World Bank problem driven political economy framework



Source: Fritz et al., 2009