

Democratic practices in climate change adaptation in six countries

Executive summary



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Contents

Contents	2
Acronyms.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Methodology	7
Overview report	8
Main findings.....	8
Recommendations	9
The Gambia.....	11
Key recommendations	11
Kenya	13
Key recommendations	13
Nigeria	15
Sierra Leone	17
Policy environment.....	17
Environmental democracy strengths and weaknesses	17
Summary of recommendations	18
Uganda.....	19
Key recommendations	20
Zambia.....	21
Policy and institutional framework for climate adaptation in Zambia	21
Key recommendations	23

Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
COP28 / COP29	Conference of the Parties (to the UNFCCC)
EDA	Environmental Democracy – Adaptation Framework
ED	Environmental Democracy (principles)
EbA	Ecosystem-Based Adaptation
FLLoCA	Financing Locally Led Climate Action
TWENDE	Towards Ending Drought Emergencies – Ecosystems-Based Adaptation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
FSRP	Food Systems Resilience Program
LIFE-AR	Least Developed Country Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience
EURECCCA	Enhancing Resilience of Communities to Climate Change through Catchment-Based Integrated Management of Water and Related Resources in Uganda
SACRiAC	Strengthening Adaptive Capacity and Resilience of Communities in Uganda’s Watersheds – Awoja Catchment
SCRALA	Scaling up Climate Ambition on Land Use and Agriculture
TRALARD	Transforming Landscapes for Resilience and Development
RICAR	Rural Integrated Climate Adaptation And Resilience Project
PROREFISH	Climate Resilient Fishery Initiative for Livelihood Improvement in The Gambia
PropCom Mai-Karfi	Rural Agriculture Markets Development Program for Northern Nigeria
ACReSAL	Agro-Climate Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
GCF	Green Climate Fund
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)
LDC	Least Developed Country
GEF	Global Environment Facility

Introduction

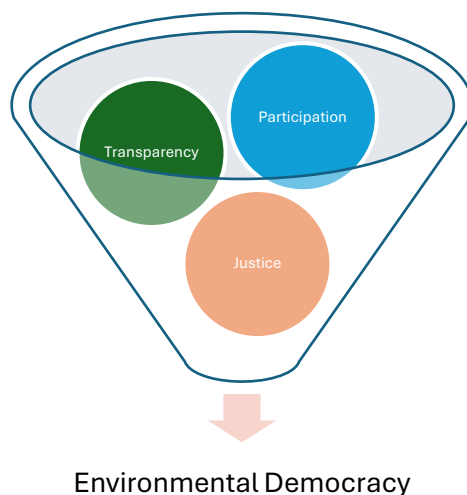
Climate adaptation remains an ever-growing priority for countries vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The world is surpassing safe levels of global mean surface temperature increases, leading to irreversible impacts and dangerous projected risks (Kotz, Levermann, and Wenz, 2024). Such risks raise the prospect of “limits to adaptation”, in which known adaptation strategies will be unable to mitigate risks, leading to permanent loss and damage experienced by people and ecosystems (UNEP, 2023).

In its 2022 report, the Independent Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) called for Climate Resilient Development, an approach that integrates adaptation and mitigation to enhance the resilience of communities and ecosystems. Climate-resilient development rests on systemic change across sectors and recognition that transitions must be equitable and just. Critically, there is no one pathway toward climate-resilient development. A complex transition is likely to have winners and losers, trade-offs, and unintended consequences (Schipper et al., 2022). Inclusive processes are needed in which societies can determine their own pathways, legitimising the choices made and reflecting on the transition as it unfolds.

Scholarly research in recent years has identified emergent principles for effective adaptation to climate risks and the avoidance of maladaptation. These include practice of recognitional, procedural, and distributive justice for vulnerable communities, combined approaches that recognise the dynamic interactions of social and ecological systems, and the need for flexible institutions – formal and informal - that integrate different knowledge types to make climate risk-informed decisions. (IPCC, 2022., Owen, 2020; Reckien, 2022).

Practitioners have coalesced around principles for locally led adaptation, which prioritise subsidiarity, long-term time frames, recognition of structural inequalities, and the need to incorporate climate information and local knowledge into planning and decision-making (Soanes et al., 2021). Environmental Democracy establishes principles for the relationship between citizens and environmental challenges, such as the need for climate-resilient development. Environmental democracy rests on three pillars:

- Participation
- Transparency
- Justice



When reviewed through the lens of principles for effective climate adaptation, a set of considerations emerges for the design, operationalisation, delivery, and evaluation of climate adaptation programmes. These principles call for the integration of vulnerable people into the planning, operationalisation, and evaluation of adaptation programmes, a renewed emphasis on generation and co-production of climate information services, the application of principles of recognitional, procedural, and distributive justice, and opportunities for accountability (Greene, 2023). Indeed, the emerging evidence on adaptation strongly suggests that deepening democratic practice is not merely a political preference, but a necessity for reducing risks to economies, livelihoods, and ecosystems.

Climate finance has been mobilised to support developing countries in adapting to climate change risks. At COP29, countries committed to raising \$300bn annually by 2035. International funds, such as the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Global Environment Facility, operate alongside and with the support of bilateral donors and multilateral development banks. Direct access modalities are gradually enabling countries to take greater ownership of the design and delivery of their programmes, and some countries are developing domestic adaptation programmes to deliver on relatively recent policies such as National Adaptation Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions, or Climate Change Strategic Action Plans. Climate adaptation programmes offer opportunities for deepening democratic processes from the local to the national level. Indeed, their very success in delivering their objectives may depend in large part on how well they create opportunities for democratic citizen engagement as articulated through the concept of environmental democracy.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy is a UK Public body that seeks to deepen democratic practice around the world. To this end, it has developed a framework for assessing the integration of environmental democracy into climate adaptation programmes. WFD is applying the framework to programmes in six countries, including The Gambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia.

This suite of country assessments was produced in collaboration with **Demo Finland**. Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – Demo Finland is a co-operative organisation of Finnish

parliamentary parties. It enhances democracy by strengthening the political participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities, and by supporting dialogue between political parties.

The following report compiles the executive summaries of each of the six country reports, as well as the executive summary from the synthesis report, which draws on learning from all of them. Each executive summary takes a slightly different approach, tailored to the readers and agendas in their own country.

Methodology

The following methodology was used to apply the framework in each country. First, a country adaptation policy review was conducted to understand the enabling environment for environmental democracy principles in the context of adaptation. The review examined existing climate policy and legislation, as well as policies related to devolution and localised structures for inclusion and decision-making.

Second, climate adaptation programmes in the country were reviewed, examining domestic and international adaptation and resilience-focused programmes from bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as climate funds. While mitigation objectives were not excluded, adaptation-focused programmes were prioritised in the search. The following criteria were used to select two to three adaptation programmes for in-depth review in each country:

- The project must have the potential to be meaningfully influenced by parliamentarians (relevance)
- The project must cover multiple districts/regions within a country (scale)
- The project must have a minimum value of £1,000,000, with a preference for higher-value programmes.
- The project must have adaptation as the primary focus
- The project must be three years in length or more

The desk review and application of the assessment utilised primary documents related to the programme, such as proposal documents, performance reports, evaluations, news, and press releases, as well as secondary literature, including NGO commentary, where available.

Supplementary interviews with key informants who had experience implementing the programme were then conducted to add nuance to the assessment and address outstanding questions arising from the desk review. Informants were selected using available networks, with an effort made to find both national and local-level informants. A total of six interviews were conducted, involving national and regional officers from RICAR and the Ecosystem-Based Adaptation (EbA)E project.

Overview report

Climate adaptation is now at the forefront of global environmental policy, demanding urgent and transformative changes within societies to achieve development that is both resilient and sustainable, and just. The inadequacy of committed and delivered funds for climate finance in the most vulnerable countries underscores the need for effective adaptation that takes an integrated, multi-sectoral approach. International frameworks, including the Global Goal on Adaptation Framework (COP28), funding instruments such as the Adaptation Fund and the Green Climate Fund, and LDC-led programmes like the Least Developed Countries Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience, are putting these principles into practice.

The principles of Environmental Democracy establish citizens' rights to a stake in environmental issues, prioritising participation, transparency, and justice. These three pillars align with calls for recognitional, procedural, and distributive justice, as well as locally led approaches, to ensure the effectiveness of climate adaptation. The Environmental Democracy in Adaptation Framework is designed to explore how these principles have been implemented in adaptation programmes in The Gambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. The methodology combined stakeholder interviews, document review, and community engagement to explore how environmental democracy principles are currently integrated, how delivery might be improved, and how practical the EDA framework is in articulating these principles.

Main findings

The application of the EDA framework across six countries revealed significant insights into the state of environmental democracy within climate adaptation programmes.

- **Participation:** Although formal mechanisms for stakeholder engagement are often in place, the depth and inclusivity of participation vary. Community involvement in planning and decision-making remains frequently limited by power asymmetries, a lack of technical capacity, and resource constraints. Effective inclusion of women, youth, and marginalised groups remains inconsistent. Critically, while there has been progress in enabling citizens and communities to identify and advice on specific investments, the strategic direction of adaptation programmes remains out of their hands.
- **Transparency:** There is a growing recognition of the need for transparent processes; however, information about adaptation planning, funding allocations, and project outcomes is not always accessible to all relevant stakeholders. Language barriers, technical complexity, and the lack of robust knowledge management systems hinder public access to critical information about the project. Furthermore, climate information that integrates local knowledge and is disseminated in practical formats is often patchy, depending on the

emphasis placed on it by donors or governments. The presence of a strong national meteorological agency seems to influence the quality of climate information in adaptation programmes.

- Justice: While many programmes have functioning and well-established mechanisms for redressing specific grievances, accountability, and the monitoring and evaluation needed to support them, they remain poor. Accountability relies on top-down reporting processes, with limited opportunities for communities to provide feedback on what is working and what is not, or to hold officials accountable for their decisions in a regular and meaningful manner.
- The highest-scoring funder was the World Bank through its International Development Assistance funding. Working through existing government systems, its recent programmes tend to emphasise subsidiarity, establishing strong institutional legacies for delivery, and locally owned financing processes. However, many of its programmes are relatively new, and the proof will be in the quality and detail of delivery.
- Funder regulations and operating structures play a significant role in determining the integration of environmental democracy. For example, international intermediaries implementing for the GCF seem to limit the inclusion of communities in strategy direction setting and management of implementation.

Despite advances, persistent gaps remain in the mainstreaming of environmental democracy principles. The research indicates that simply embedding participatory language in policy is not enough; genuine transformation requires reshaping institutional cultures, financing, and accountability mechanisms to centre community agency.

Recommendations

Stakeholders may derive a wide range of recommendations from this report. Adaptation requires a “whole-of-society” approach, in which stakeholders across society collaborate to create the conditions for transformative change toward resilient societies. This means that parliamentarians and their supporters can focus on creating environments that enable deeper participation and partnerships with communities. For funders, the regulations that guide funding delivery must be adjusted to create opportunities to go beyond consultation with communities on their priorities and to facilitate integration into strategic processes.

- Deepening Participation: Institutionalise participatory processes that give real decision-making power to communities, especially marginalised groups. Invest in capacity building and leadership development at the grassroots level. There is scope for considering

recognitional, procedural, and distributive justice principles at each stage of the project cycle.

- **Enhancing Transparency:** Establish proactive disclosure protocols for adaptation plans, budgets, and outcomes, using accessible formats and languages. Support community-led monitoring and evaluation of adaptation projects.
- **Advancing Justice:** Review accountability procedures to encourage bottom-up accountability. This might be achieved through regular reporting to community meetings, or through active methods in which citizens audit the delivery of programs, or have representatives integrated into key review, quality assurance, and decision-making processes.
- **Scaling Locally Led Adaptation:** Provide direct funding and flexible resources to locally led initiatives, enabling experimentation and context-sensitive solutions. Elevate local knowledge and priorities in the design and evaluation of adaptation policies and projects.
- **Adopting and Refining Frameworks:** Encourage broader adoption of the EDA assessment framework, coupled with ongoing refinement based on user feedback. Integrate its use into funding criteria and reporting requirements for adaptation finance.
- Political parties can raise the issue of localisation of climate finance up the national agenda, challenging the temptation of ruling governments to have funds centrally directed by national ministries.
- **Raising awareness of the value and potential of climate finance:** building coalitions between civil society and the private sector, demanding climate finance that is sufficient and structured in ways that facilitate democratic oversight and control.
- Elected representatives at the local level can play a significant role in representing the climate adaptation priorities of different groups within their constituencies. They can support oversight and transparency of climate finance, ensuring procurement is inclusive, and that learning from past adaptation investments informs future investment, in collaboration with CSOs.
- Related, MPs can push for greater transparency in adaptation finance flows, advocating for budget tracking and harmonised reporting from donors, and exploring structured multi-level collaboration for adaptation oversight with Members of local chambers of representation (Councillors, MCAs).

By embedding environmental democracy at the heart of climate adaptation, programmes can become more effective, legitimate, and resilient, ensuring that the communities most affected by climate impacts play a leading role in shaping their own futures.

The Gambia

Climate change adaptation is becoming increasingly necessary due to the escalating impacts of climate change. Building on scholarly research and practitioner experience, principles for effective adaptation to climate change are emerging that highlight the importance of recognitional, procedural, and distributive justice, as well as the value of adaptation that is locally led, owned, and evaluated. Climate finance promised from developed to developing countries is flowing in greater quantities. However, to date, it has been vulnerable to criticism that it is counterproductive, at least in part due to top-down and rushed models of delivery.

Environmental Democracy establishes principles for the relationship between citizens and environmental challenges, including the development of a pathway toward climate-resilient development. Environmental democracy is founded on three pillars: participation, transparency, and justice. The Environmental Democracy – Adaptation (EDA) Framework is a tool for assessing the extent to which principles of effective adaptation, participation, transparency and justice are shaping climate adaptation programmes: Climate Resilient Fishery Initiative for Livelihood Improvement In the Gambia (PROREFISH), Rural Integrated Climate Adaptation And Resilience Project (RICAR), and the Large Scale Ecosystem Based Adaptation in The Gambia project (EbA). PROREFISH and EbA are both GCF-funded, while the Adaptation Fund funds RICAR.

The climate policy environment in The Gambia is still developing. A relatively small population and a long history of community-based natural resource management give it some long-standing strengths in relation to environmental democracy. Conceptualisations of communities as partners and the integration of traditional or customary institutions into local government bestow legitimacy and some legacy of citizen management of public goods. However, the environment is weaker in key areas, including the co-production of climate information and opportunities for bottom-up accountability, where communities can hold implementers and governments directly accountable.

The three case study projects share some similarities in that their commitment to participation, as indicated by medium or higher scores for vision, resourcing, and subsidiarity, typically does not translate into the details of implementation and management. In alignment with scores for the enabling environment, monitoring, evaluation, and learning, as well as accountability and climate information, tend to score poorly.

Key recommendations

Some key recommendations emerging from the review include:

- Strengthen accountability: Establish bottom-up accountability systems through community meetings and transparent reporting to build trust and improve responsiveness.
- Empower local institutions: Support decentralisation by integrating local government institutions such as development committees.

- Enhance community representation: Include civil society organisations in project steering committees for strategic decision-making, enabling adaptive management based on local knowledge and awareness of citizens' rights.
- Promote participatory monitoring: Engage communities in identifying outcomes and interpreting evaluation data to improve learning and ownership of the process.
- Enhance climate information services by incorporating local knowledge into advisories and forecasts to increase trust and preparedness.
- Increase accessibility: Disseminate programme information in local languages and user-friendly formats.
- Invest in consultations: Fund in-depth community consultations for effective project design, in advance of the programme. This may require a dedicated funding source.
- Address gender gaps: Conduct comprehensive gender analyses to inform programme design and delivery, and articulate how they influence programming
- Extend programme timelines: Design projects lasting beyond five years to enable environmental democracy innovations to bed in
- Include communities in procurement: Involve communities in the selection process of consultants to enhance ownership and participation.

Kenya

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The EDA framework has been applied to policies and adaptation programmes in six countries: Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and The Gambia. In Kenya, the framework was applied to three programmes: The Kenya Climate Change Adaptation Project (Adaptation Fund), Financing Locally Led Climate Action (World Bank), and Towards Ending Drought Emergencies – Ecosystems-Based Adaptation (Green Climate Fund).

Kenya's policy environment is broadly conducive to environmental democracy in adaptation. Policies are robust in ensuring citizen engagement in shaping the direction of adaptation projects, and in facilitating transparency of project and climate information. However, it is weaker at enabling communities to engage in the details of adaptation delivery and oversight, which may potentially undermine the quality of investments and accountability.

Of the three programmes, FLLoCA and TWENDE both have moderate scores for their integration of environmental democracy principles. While the overall vision for citizen participation remains high, facilitating greater oversight and management, as well as bottom-up accountability, has proven challenging, particularly during the process of scaling up the program.

Key recommendations

The recommendations for enhancing environmental democracy in adaptation emphasize the importance of enabling citizen participation, ensuring transparency, and integrating local knowledge into climate information services.

Enabling environment: Encouraging citizen groups to innovate in procurement and oversight services can enhance investment resilience and reduce corruption. Kenya should consider institutionalizing bottom-up accountability through mandatory, inclusive barazas where adaptation decisions are explained to communities.

Participation: Sufficient resources must be allocated for participatory activities, including monitoring, evaluation, learning (MEL), and the selection of adaptation interventions. Climate finance that reaches the local level strengthens climate risk management and public participation.

Transparency: Although progress has been made in the transparency of program and climate information, further work is needed to integrate local and indigenous knowledge into forecasts and advisories. Counties should explore both traditional and technological dissemination options to ensure accessibility of information for all communities.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL): Engaging communities in MEL processes is crucial. Inclusive data collection and reflection platforms can better inform government and autonomous adaptation efforts, ensuring that they work in harmony to create sustainable, adaptive solutions.

Nigeria

Climate change adaptation is becoming increasingly necessary due to the escalating impacts of climate change. Building on scholarly research and practitioner experience, principles for effective adaptation to climate change are emerging that highlight the importance of recognitional, procedural, and distributive justice, as well as the value of adaptation that is locally led, owned, and evaluated. Climate finance promised from developed to developing countries is flowing in greater quantities. However, to date, it has been vulnerable to criticism that it is counterproductive, at least in part due to top-down and rushed models of delivery.

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Propom Mai-Karfi, an FCDO–UK project initiated in 2012, scores a mixture of medium and low scores across the 14 indicators of the framework. While it has a reasonable commitment to empowering communities as independent actors and recognises structural marginalisation, it is not set up to fully include participants in its program decision-making, the selection of approaches, or in gathering feedback on how the approaches are working. Notably, for a program operating in climate-vulnerable areas, climate information plays a minimal role, leaving it open to the risk that the value chains being developed may be maladaptive in uncertain future climate scenarios.

By contrast, the ACRESAL project, developed more recently by the World Bank and with a significant budget, takes an approach centred around public goods and institutional strengthening. It scores much more highly, working through community committees and government institutions to identify rangeland management and public good investments. As such, it scores relatively highly across a range of indicators, engaging communities in identifying investments, selecting service provision, and committing to subsidiarity of decision-making in meaningful ways. Where it is weaker, it is through its approach to transparency and co-production of climate information services.

The two case studies raise questions about how the methods of environmental democracy can be applied to programs seeking to invest in private rather than public goods. Environmental democracy is more easily applied to public sector-oriented programmes, where enabling environments often create space for community participation through existing, established institutions of governance. In a private sector program which relies on market processes to bring benefits to participating communities, a concerted effort is needed to engage those communities in understanding whether the selected value chains are appropriate, whether capacity building is

reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised, and to facilitate monitoring, evaluation and learning that reflects local understanding of what would constitute improved resilience in their own context.

The case studies and review of the enabling environment identify specific areas where investments could be made to improve environmental democracy. A key area that stands out is the “justice” aspect. Higher scores require a measure of downward accountability and a clearly defined grievance redress mechanism that ideally works through local institutions to resolve specific grievances arising from project activities in context-appropriate ways. Policies in Nigeria lack clarity in this area, and learning from programs such as ACRESAL may enable some incorporation into future sectoral and government programming.

Establishing principles for participatory monitoring, learning, and evaluation would also enable communities to set the conditions for measuring success. This is particularly important for marginalised and vulnerable communities who can articulate measures of change in the power dynamics at the root of vulnerability to climate risks. Programmes could invest in integrating communities or their representatives not just in collecting data and reporting on local change, but also in interpreting the information and identifying the lessons to carry forward into future phases of work.

Finally, integrating communities and their representatives into strategic decision-making processes would create opportunities for high-level decision-makers to interface directly with local perspectives. This is particularly important if circumstances in a target area change, for example, the onset of a drought or other climate-related hazard. The integration of community perspectives at a higher level can support adaptive management by ensuring that local knowledge is effectively integrated into high-level decision-making. It might also foster greater local ownership of the programme.

Sierra Leone

Climate change adaptation is becoming increasingly necessary due to the escalating impacts of climate change. Building on scholarly research and practitioner experience, principles for effective adaptation are emerging that emphasise recognitional, procedural, and distributive justice, alongside the importance of locally led adaptation. Climate finance continues to be mobilised by public, private, domestic, and international sources to enable developing countries to deliver on adaptation plans and strategies.

Environmental democracy establishes principles for how citizens relate to environmental challenges, including the need for climate-resilient development. It rests on three pillars: participation, transparency, and justice. The Environmental Democracy–Adaptation (EDA) Framework is a tool used to assess how effectively these principles are shaping climate adaptation programmes. This framework has been applied to policies and adaptation programmes in six countries, including Sierra Leone.

Policy environment

Sierra Leone has demonstrated a growing political commitment to climate action, as reflected in key policy documents from 2021, including the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and the National Adaptation Plan (NAP). Reforms such as the Local Government Act of 2022 and the new Fiscal Decentralisation Policy of 2025 indicate an intention to empower local governments and create conditions for locally led approaches to development, with adaptation. Despite these positive developments, the policy environment still faces significant challenges. Institutional frameworks remain fragmented, funding for locally led initiatives is limited, and outdated or conflicting legislation hinders cohesive action across sectors. Although policy commitments are ambitious, practical implementation often lacks sufficient resources and clear institutional arrangements, which prevent progress toward transformational outcomes.

Environmental democracy strengths and weaknesses

The review of three major climate finance programmes in Sierra Leone, including the Food Systems Resilience Program (FSRP), the Resilient Urban Sierra Leone Project, and the Adapting to Climate Change Induced Coastal Risks Management Project, revealed both encouraging advances and persistent challenges in integrating environmental democracy principles.

Some key strengths include the emergence of locally led adaptation efforts, particularly evident in the FreeTownTreeTown project, which demonstrates strong community ownership, participatory decision-making, and innovative financing through digital tools and carbon markets. There has been increased attention to gender equality and inclusion, with several programmes focusing specifically on women, youth, and vulnerable groups. However, further work could be done to ensure these groups are integrated into decision-making processes. Donor-funded projects have also introduced grievance mechanisms and social safeguards, providing pathways for accountability and redress.

Nonetheless, significant weaknesses remain. Participation is often limited to consultation rather than genuine partnership with communities and their representatives, or collaborative decision-making, leaving communities with little influence over high-level program design or budget decisions. Transparency remains low, with limited publicly available information on budgets, project outcomes, and climate information, particularly in formats accessible to non-technical audiences and marginalised groups. Justice gaps persist, with structural inequalities not fully addressed, especially for people with disabilities and those in remote rural areas. The digital divide has widened since the COVID-19 pandemic, further excluding many people from accessing climate information or participating in adaptation planning. Local councils often lack the mandates and resources necessary to implement adaptation interventions, despite policies emphasising decentralisation and subsidiarity.

Summary of recommendations

To strengthen environmental democracy in climate adaptation, it is recommended that Sierra Leone finalise and enact climate legislation that mandates participatory planning and clearly defines local roles. Dedicated funding should be available to build capabilities and provide resources for communities to co-design and manage adaptation projects. Climate data should be co-produced with communities and made accessible in local languages and inclusive formats. Participatory monitoring and learning systems are needed to empower communities in shaping adaptation strategies. Bridging the digital divide is essential through expanded connectivity and digital literacy initiatives. Finally, sharing lessons across projects will support continuous learning and inform future adaptation efforts.

Uganda

Climate change adaptation is becoming increasingly necessary due to the escalating impacts of climate change. Building on scholarly research and practitioner experience, principles for effective adaptation are emerging that point to the practice of recognition, procedural, and distributive justice, as well as to the value of adaptation that is locally led. Climate finance continues to be mobilised by public, private, domestic, and international sources to enable developing countries to deliver on adaptation plans and strategies.

Environmental Democracy establishes principles for the relationship of citizens to environmental challenges, including the need for climate-resilient development. Environmental democracy rests on three pillars: participation, transparency, and justice. The Environmental Democracy – Adaptation (EDA) Framework is a tool for assessing the extent to which principles of effective adaptation, participation, transparency, and justice are shaping climate adaptation programmes.

The EDA framework has been applied to policies and adaptation programmes in six countries – Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and The Gambia. In Uganda, we looked at three programmes: Enhancing Resilience of Communities to Climate Change through Catchment-Based Integrated Management of Water and Related Resources in Uganda (Adaptation Fund), the Least Developed Country Initiative for Effective Adaptation (multiple bilateral donors), and Strengthening Adaptive Capacity and Resilience of Communities in Uganda’s Watersheds- Awoja Catchment (Global Environment Facility).

Uganda’s climate change policies demonstrate a clear understanding of the need for adaptation, emphasizing the importance of participation and transparency. The National Climate Change Policy promotes civil society involvement, and the Climate Change Act sets up institutional structures and supports decentralization. However, real decision-making power and financial resources are not significantly devolved to local levels. Policymaking remains largely top-down, and local stakeholders have limited autonomy in shaping adaptation actions. Monitoring, evaluation, and public engagement, especially with marginalized communities, are underdeveloped, and the co-creation of climate information is limited. Justice and accountability are also limited, as the Act lacks precise grievance mechanisms that are more accessible to communities than courts of law or robust accountability systems.

The reviewed climate programs in Uganda show varying levels of commitment to environmental democracy, with notable strengths in stakeholder engagement and participatory structures. Programs like EURECCCA and LIFE-AR highlight efforts to involve local communities through mechanisms such as Catchment Management Committees and Parish Climate Change Committees. LIFE-AR stands out for prioritizing locally led adaptation, giving communities significant decision-making power and financial control. EURECCCA also emphasizes local capacity building, and SACRiAC integrates traditional governance structures, such as cultural leaders, into its participatory approach.

However, weaknesses are also apparent across the programs. Transparency remains a challenge, with none of the programs scoring higher than medium, indicating that comprehensive and accessible program information is not consistently provided to all stakeholders. While grievance mechanisms are mentioned, their effective functioning and citizen awareness of environmental rights need to be strengthened. Downward accountability mechanisms, which enable citizens to hold implementing stakeholders accountable, are generally weak, except for the potential offered by community barazas in LIFE-AR; however, their effectiveness remains to be fully determined.

The design processes for climate projects tend to be top-down, despite the presence of community consultations. While efforts are made to include vulnerable groups, addressing entrenched structural inequalities and ensuring their meaningful participation throughout the project cycle requires further attention and consideration. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes generally lack deep citizen involvement, limiting continuous learning beyond the project's lifetime.

Key recommendations

The assessment recommends several actions to strengthen environmental democracy in Uganda's efforts to adapt to climate change. These include:

- Including empowering local communities in decision-making and resource control, moving beyond consultation to allow greater influence in program priorities and investments, potentially through mechanisms like participatory budgeting,
- Institutionalizing monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) processes with active citizen involvement throughout the program cycle
- Promoting the co-production of climate information by integrating scientific and local knowledge
- Updating the national policy framework to include accessible grievance redress mechanisms beyond the formal courts and strengthening downward accountability mechanisms to enable citizens to hold implementing stakeholders accountable through methods like community barazas
- Raising public awareness of environmental rights and available redress mechanisms using accessible formats and languages.

Zambia

Zambia is increasingly facing climate-related risks, including prolonged periods of drought, irregular rainfall patterns, and elevated temperatures, all of which threaten livelihoods, natural ecosystems, and the national economy. In response to these challenges, Zambia has made progress in integrating climate resilience into national development planning and formulating climate adaptation policies and programs, with efforts to align interventions with the national decentralisation agenda, which encourages local participation and engagement. However, significant gaps persist in the effective implementation of inclusive and democratic adaptation principles. This report utilizes the Environmental Democracy Adaptation Framework, developed by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), to evaluate the alignment of Zambia's climate adaptation initiatives with the core principles of *participation*, *transparency*, and *justice*. The analysis encompasses both national policies and three adaptation programs.

Policy and institutional framework for climate adaptation in Zambia

Zambia has been rolling out its decentralisation agenda over the last decade in a bid to bring development decision-making closer to citizens. The Local Government Act of 2019 and the National Decentralisation Policy of 2023 have been instrumental in transferring authority from central to local governments. Citizen participation, therefore, features prominently across many national policies, including climate policies. Zambia has established a solid policy and institutional foundation for climate adaptation, aligning national development objectives with climate resilience goals. The country's strategic frameworks, such as the National Policy on Climate Change and the more recent National Adaptation Plan, outline Zambia's priorities for adaptation across various sectors, with a particular emphasis on agriculture, water, forestry, and infrastructure. The Environmental Democratic (ED) adaptation principles of *participation* are reflected positively in various policies examined, indicating efforts to include citizen participation in policy processes. However, the *transparency* and *justice* principles are not strongly reflected, indicating a need for a more deliberate approach in sharing information about programmes with citizens, ensuring downward accountability to citizens in the implementation of policies, addressing grievances, and enhancing climate information services.

The EDA framework was applied to three case studies. Each was implemented by a different funder with different objectives and a variety of organising rationales. TRALARD, a World Bank-funded programme, aims to enhance resilience and sustainable development in Zambia by focusing on landscape restoration and community-based adaptation. The project operates in targeted districts in the northern region, focusing on ecosystem restoration, sustainable land management, and biodiversity conservation. Key activities include reforestation, soil conservation, and improving water management practices. Additionally, TRALARD emphasizes community involvement, building local capacity, and fostering climate-resilient livelihoods. The project has strengthened the institutional framework at subnational levels by embedding climate adaptation into

district and ward development plans. Overall, most of the ED principles are positively reflected in the project. TRALARD scores particularly highly for enabling citizens to shape and direct decision-making relating to adaptation interventions, from specific interventions through to strategic priorities. It scores poorly for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, which has a traditional, top-down and extractive approach, and for bottom-up accountability.

The Ecosystem-Based Adaptation (EbA) in Wetlands and Forests project focuses on enhancing climate resilience through the restoration and conservation of critical ecosystems in Zambia, with a particular emphasis on the Bangweulu Wetlands and Lukanga Wetlands. The project integrates community-based approaches to enhance biodiversity, improve water management, and promote sustainable livelihoods. Key activities include wetland restoration, reforestation, and promoting agroforestry practices. By involving local communities in planning and implementation, EbA fosters ownership and ensures that adaptation measures are culturally relevant and practical. The ED principles of *participation* and *transparency* are not strongly reflected in the project. Several gaps are identified across key indicators, including visioning, resourcing, subsidiarity, program priorities, MEL, and climate information. The greatest strengths in ED are seen in establishing legitimate participatory institutions, with strong efforts to engage local leadership and local decision-making structures.

SCRALA aims to enhance the resilience of agricultural livelihoods in Zambia's Agro-Ecological Regions I and II. It focuses on enhancing the adaptive capacity of smallholder farmers by promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices and technologies, such as drought-tolerant crops, efficient water management, and sustainable land use. The project focuses on capacity building, technical support, and access to climate information, enabling farmers to make informed decisions about their farming practices. SCRALA also supports the integration of climate adaptation into local development plans and policies, fostering ownership and sustainability. Overall, the project has a fair reflection of most ED principles, which are implemented to some extent, with some room for improvement. The project scores highly in sustainable participation, with the greatest need for improvement in resourcing, implementation management, and climate information.

The evaluation of Zambia's climate adaptation initiatives using the Environmental Democracy Adaptation Framework reveals key insights and areas for improvement. Significant progress has been made in integrating climate resilience into national development planning, with strong institutional frameworks and citizen participation highlighted in various policies. However, gaps persist in transparency and justice, necessitating more deliberate information sharing and downward accountability. Case studies of TRALARD, EbA, and SCRALA projects illustrate varying degrees of success in embedding democratic principles into adaptation programmes. TRALARD excels in community involvement and sustainable participation but needs improvement in participatory monitoring and accountability. The EbA project demonstrates strengths in establishing participatory institutions but lacks transparency and allocates insufficient resources for citizen participatory activities. SCRALA fares well in sustainable participation but requires better resourcing and implementation management. Overall, these findings underscore the need for enhanced transparency, accountability, and justice in climate adaptation processes to ensure equitable and effective outcomes for citizens.

Key recommendations

Some key recommendations emerging from the review include:

- Co-design new programmes with citizens from start to finish, creating space to shape sectoral focus areas as well as specific interventions
- Develop a more sophisticated understanding of structural exclusion, working with intersectionality as a concept to understand how climate risks affect specific groups in particular ways, and understanding the specific priorities of those groups
- Develop capabilities for participatory, community-led MEL, integrating citizens into setting indicators, interpreting and analysing data, and articulating learning
- Strengthen mechanisms for downward accountability, in which officials report regularly to citizen committees or where citizens are incorporated into traditional hierarchies to share perspectives in key decision-making contexts
- Develop clear frameworks for grievance redress, establishing compensation processes that are accessible and trustworthy
- Promote budgetary accountability by disclosing adaptation spending at the local level

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