

Working Paper

CHALLENGES IN ADAPTING TO CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Exploring institutional and socio-political
barriers to flexible and forward-looking
decision-making in three African districts

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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 result in 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 effectuate it in practice.

That processes of Flexible and Forward-looking Decision-Making (FFDM) should be imbedded into all stages of development planning is therefore relatively clear. Yet in practice, few development programmes adequately consider future changes to their external and internal environments in programme design. Fewer still have sought to inform activities based on possible future outlooks and account for change and uncertainty within planning processes. Several key questions thus remain: why has conventional development programming so far failed to deal with change and uncertainty? What are the primary barriers to a flexible forward-looking approach within development contexts? And how can many of the obstacles to its integration and implementation be practically overcome?

In seeking to address some of these queries, this paper explores key institutional barriers in preventing effective FFDM within conventional development policy and programming. More specifically, it explores the influence of various institutional and socio-political 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 socio-political 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 socio-political barriers to FFDM at the local level. It highlights the benefits of using 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, this paper argues that system-wide transformation (in terms of interest, motivations and incentives) is needed in order for FFDM to be effectively adopted across scales.

1 Introduction

Change and uncertainty are immovable principles of development. Structures of governance have long had to deal with a myriad of changing threats and opportunities that require flexible, reflexive and informed approaches to decision-making. Yet on the whole, the pace and scale of change in the 21st century is increasingly apparent as global markets become ever more closely linked, communication links increase in coverage and accessibility, and pressures on natural resources intensify (Bennet & Bennet 2008). Added to this, the impacts of climate change are likely exacerbate existing development challenges, as "more floods, more droughts, more strong storms, and more heat waves make development policy and practice more complicated" (World Bank, 2010).

With this in mind, improving the ability of governance mechanisms (both national and local) to deal with change is increasingly a focus of international support for adaptation to climate change. Despite the need for decision-making processes to account for change (and recognising the considerable diversity of actors, activities and interests) the focus of development planning remains rigid and predominantly rooted in shorter-term timescales. Moreover, programmes largely act on the assumption of a stable future outlook: identifying a community's present threats, addressing current needs, and exploiting recent opportunities (Levine et al. 2011).

Few development interventions (whether government, NGO or civil society led) have paid sufficient attention to the impact of changing internal and external pressures on programmatic operations, particularly in the medium-to-longer-term. Fewer still have invested in the resources, and instigated the reforms, needed to do so adequately in the light changing climate and development press (Ludi et al. 2012). Reasons for this are numerous and stem not only from the priorities and interests of development implementers (i.e. those responsible for delivering development projects on the ground), but reflect issues of political economy within the development system as a whole.

Recognising this shortfall, the development community is slowly awakening to key concepts and ideas from related fields such as political economy analysis, complex adaptive systems, and horizon scanning (e.g. Tanner & Allouche, 2011; Fritz, et al., 2009; O'Hara, 2012; Ramalingham & Jones, 2008). Together, each provides valuable evidence in justifying the inadequacy of current decision-making processes in responding to complex and uncertain futures (Jones 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 socio-political barriers to FFDM in district development plans across three sites in Mozambique, Uganda and Ethiopia. Specifically the paper adopts a problem-driven political economy approach (PEA) to identify the processes, challenges and entry-points for adaptation and development policy and programming at the all levels. 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.

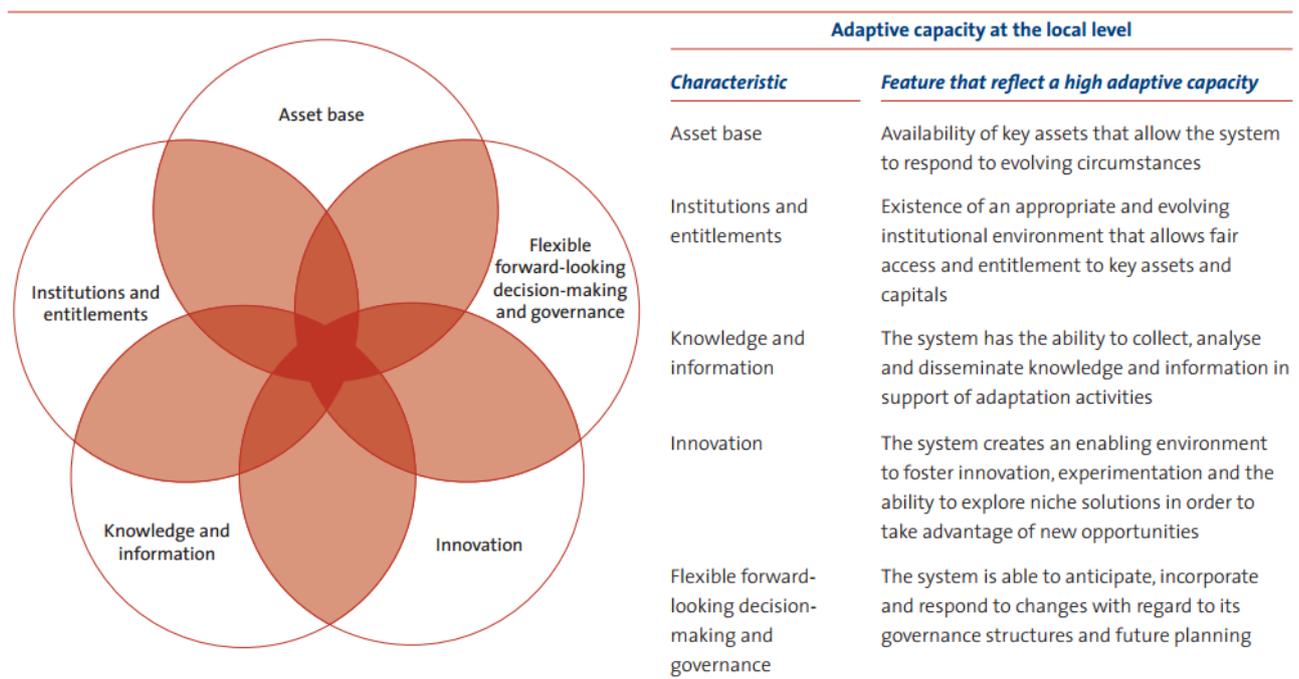
2 Methods, Scope and Background

The findings described in this paper are a synthesis of 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 structures¹.

2.1 The Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA)

The Africa Climate Change Resilience Alliance (ACCRA) is an alliance of five development partners, namely: Oxfam GB, the Overseas Development Institute, Save the Children, World Vision International and Care 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 applied the Local Adaptive Capacity framework (LAC) which describes five 'characteristics of adaptive capacity'² (for more see Jones et al 2010). The framework was applied to each of the country contexts as a lens through which to assess the impacts of development interventions on adaptive capacity.

Figure 1. The Local Adaptive Capacity framework



¹ 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/>

² The five characteristics are made up of: the asset base; institutions and entitlements; knowledge and information; innovation; and flexible forward-looking decision-making.

The focus of this paper is on one particular characteristic of adaptive capacity: namely, flexible and forward-looking decision making and governance. 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 2010). 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.

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 and 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 and Huq, 2009).

Any analysis of governance must 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, between men and women and between old and young. 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, using any methodology, 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-to-three research sites were identified in each county. Sites were chosen to represent different livelihoods, different agro-ecological characteristics, and different types of project intervention, including: disaster risk reduction, social protection and livelihoods 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 further details of methods and approach from Phase I see: Jones et al. 2011 for Uganda; Ludi et al. 2011 for Ethiopia; and Arnall. 2011 for Mozambique.

The second Phase of ACCRA's research focused on district government planning. More specifically: 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 qualitative mixed methods approach to the first phase. In addition, researchers applied a problem driven political economy framework to assess institutional and socio-political 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. Care was taken to include perspectives from across district and national government, INGO and civil society (for a full list of interviewees see Annex C). The 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 socio-economic profiles of ACCRA countries and sites see Annex A.

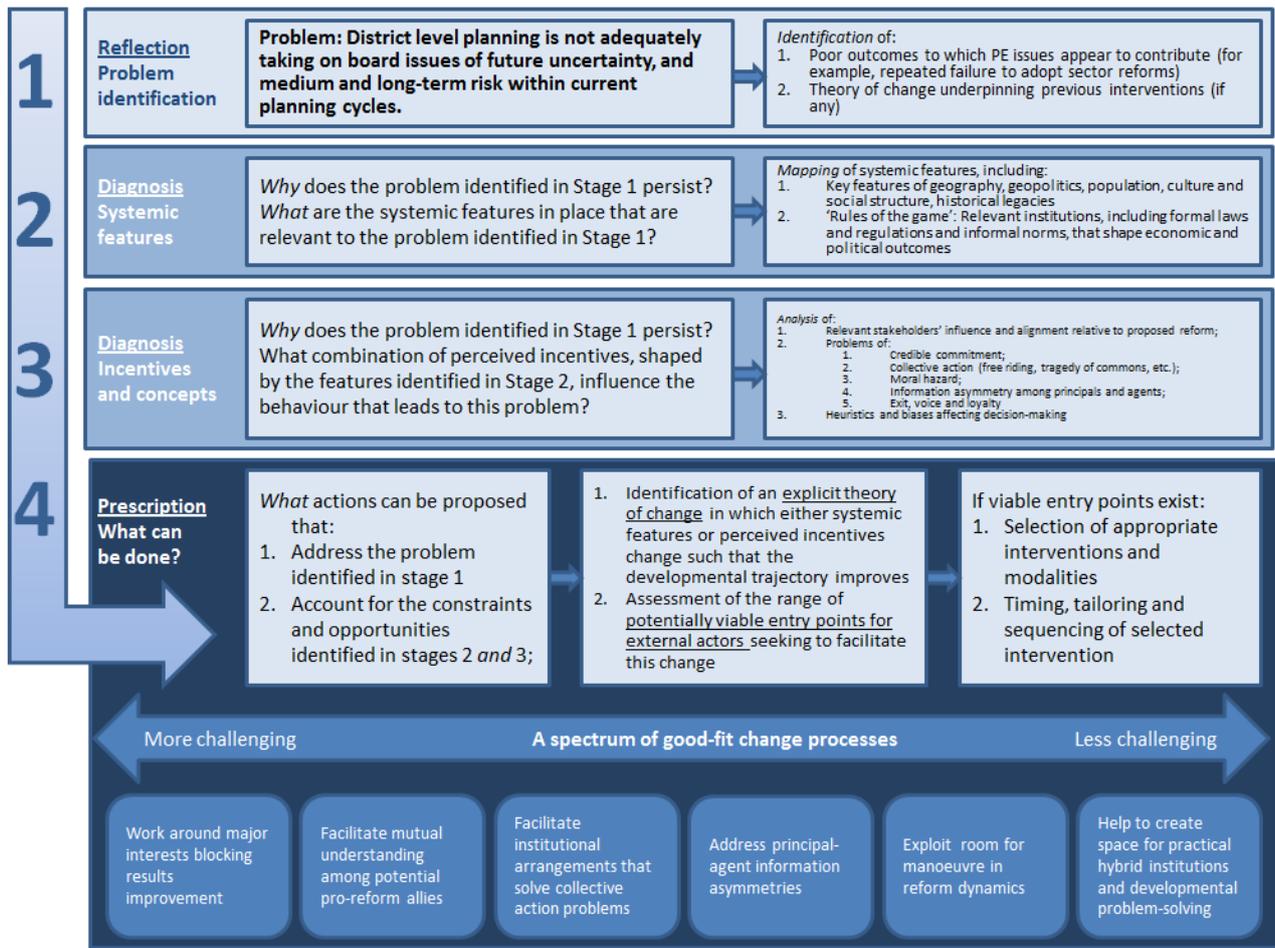
For the purposes of this paper, research outputs are used from both Phase I and Phase II of ACCRA research. This allows for an overall synthesis of common findings that relate to the extent to which FFDM processes are imbedded within both NGO and district government actors across the three countries. 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 the three country contexts.

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 - focusing 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) identifies the processes, challenges and barriers for a 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 Fritz et al (2009)

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 sector as a whole. The 'development sector' is frequently referred to yet lacking a universally accepted definition. It is largely used as 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 (such as 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 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 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 important is an appreciation of the diversity of working practices, institutional set-ups, and incentives. Thus, any synthesis of

key barriers and opportunities affecting the sector has to take into account the various generalities 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 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 directly 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 - though 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 and 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 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?

From a planning perspective, the development sector has (as a whole) engaged poorly with changes in its internal and external operating environment (Viravaidya and Hayssen 2001). Though the sector is considerably heterogeneous, the standard mode of delivery see development actors continue to plan for, and deliver outputs towards relatively short-term agendas seeking to address the immediate needs or priorities of their intended beneficiaries (Boyd et al. 2009; Ludi et al 2011). Development planning - both with regards to NGO and government activities - typically operates on 3 or 5-year planning cycles, often with annual cyclical reviews. Seldom are objectives and activities integrated effectively within policy and planning.

Reasons for this are numerous, and are by no means solely attributable to the actions and incentives of development implementers (i.e. those tasked with delivering programmes on the ground). In unpacking underlying drivers behind the short-term and responsive nature of development

planning, it is important to look at the system as-a-whole (and the interest, motivations and incentives of the actors that shape it). The landscape of development funding can be considered somewhat unimodal: the terms and conditions of support are often rigid, requiring a rapid identification of local priorities, the development of a targeted plan or approach, and the delivery of a certain number of outputs and activities. Financial support is typically delivered in the form of three to five year funding cycles (some are far shorter, others longer) and often targeted towards a particular sector such as disaster risk reduction, social protection, or sustainable livelihoods. In this sense, the same is generally true for developing country governments as it is for INGO, civil society operations and UN agencies.

In turn, development funders (external public donors, and to some extent developing country governments) are pressured and held to accountable 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 skewing the agenda towards the delivery of short-term outcomes (preferably tangible and easily quantifiable ones) ahead of the strengthening or creating effective processes and institutions needed to deliver development objectives in the face of uncertainty and/or longer-term change (and often far harder to 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.

The call to imbed FFDM into planning and funding streams within the development sector is not new. 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). Yet, whether the system itself has changed to accommodate these principles on the ground is questionable.

Scarcely do longer term objectives and likely changes in external operating environments get holistically integrated into planning cycles (Levine et al 2011). Even rarer is the inclusion of proponents of FFDM within M&E and appraisal systems (crucial in by providing incentivising for action) (Brooks et al 2011). Notable exceptions, and the importance of longer-term thinking and risk management, are gradually gaining prominence within the development and humanitarian sectors (largely spurred on by recent high-profile crises such as in the Horn of Africa in 2011). However, the pace of change within the structures of development and humanitarian sectors (modalities of funding, operational planning, delivery of outputs, etc.) remains slow (Levine et al. 2011b).

3.3 A snapshot of development planning at the sub-national level

Moving to a focus on ACCRA's three research csites, the main instruments for development planning and governance at the local level are seen in the form of District Development Plans (DDPs)³. DDPs form the mainstay of many developing country governance structures and are meant to guide the

³ Each country has different structural segregations for sub-national planning. For example, 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.

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 mainstay of the analysis of this paper.

Coordinated and led by district governments, DPPs are closely aligned to the National Development Plans. These lay out an overarching set of

Box 1. The process 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 prioritize 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). This is done on an annual basis.

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

External Control: Monitoring and evaluation

Source: Artur et al (2012)

activities and targets for the country as a whole (in some cases there are also regional /provincial plans which 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, key development sectors and financial planning for various planning levels - provide the mechanism which, in principle, link district and national development activities.

Though DPPs operate on a 5 year planning cycle, district governments also carry out annual monitoring and budgetary reviews (see Box 2 for a description of annual cycles in Uganda). In Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda the process of identifying and prioritising district needs is, in theory, largely decentralised (see Box 1). Development needs should be first identified at the village level and filtered up, 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)

3.3.1 Other key players in district governance

While DPPs are coordinated and led by district government, a number of other actors play a significant role in influencing decision-making at the local level.

At a higher scale, 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 and Economic Development largely dictate the allocation and

designation of development funding streams at the local level. Other important agencies include Ministries (or Departments in case the Ethiopia) of Planning, often responsible for setting the parameters of national and sub-national planning cycles.

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 2012). 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.

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 (such as the District Disaster Management Committee in Kotido for example) are each included in the discussions over DDP development and annual reviews. More importantly perhaps are other informal institutions and historical influences. Religious or faith-based ideals and ethnic/tribal interactions and rituals have a definitive influence on decision-making processes across all three countries - particularly with regards to the allocation of resources and prioritisation of district actions. Many of these are, somewhat inevitably, a source of conflict and tension.

Historical legacies are particularly prevalent. Perhaps the strongest example of this is from Kotido, Uganda; part of the Karamoja sub-region, the area that has experienced continual external influence and political neglect - a legacy of colonial interference that has remained within successive national governments (for more see Muhumuza 2012, and 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 spend (as discussed in in sections 4 and 5.)

Box 2. The annual process of review in district development planning process, Uganda

The planning process at the district level is synchronised with planning at higher levels of government. The planning cycle can be described through the following steps:

Annual performance review: District planning begins in July with a review and analysis of the previous year's development outcomes including assessments of government department performance;

Needs assessment: Data collected during the performance review is then used to produce a sector work plan detailing objectives, priorities, expected outputs and expenditure allocations;

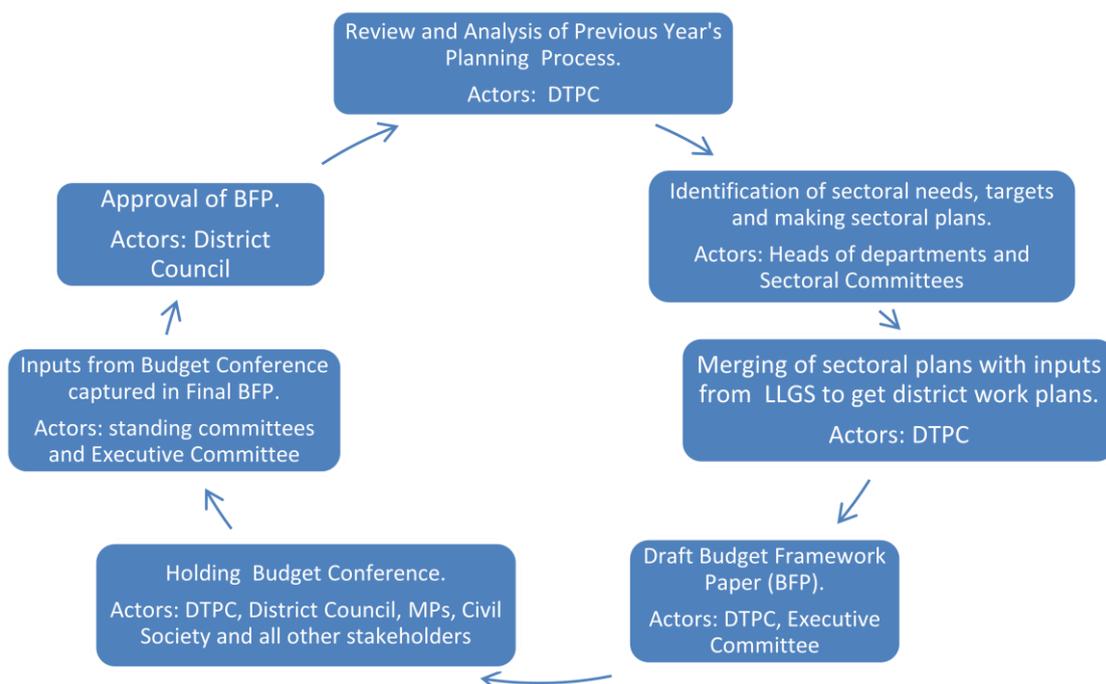
Needs assessment review: The sector plan is circulated internally for consideration by the respective standing committee of council before submission to the District Technical Planning Committee;

Work plan development: Departmental feedback on the sector plan is collated by the DTPC and combined with inputs from local levels of government which represent findings from local community consultations to form the initial work plan and Budget Framework Paper (BFP);

First internal review: The work plan and BFP is assess alongside district resource estimates to ensure appropriate funding is available as a prerequisite to submission to the Executive Committee of the District Council for consideration;

External review: Stakeholders, including technical heads of departments, councilors, religious and community leaders and NGOs operating in the area are invited to a Budget Conference for inputs on the current planning document.

Second internal review: the Standing Committee and Executive Committee meet to consider and approve the BFP, updated with any inputs from the Budget Conference.



Source: Muhumuza & Jones 2012

4 Findings and analysis

Though clear contextual differences are apparent, ACCRA's research points to a general failure of local governance structures to account for principles of FFDM within the three research sites⁴. Findings showcase the rigid nature of planning processes and inability to account for change and uncertainty within district policy and planning. Below is a synthesis of key institutional and socio-political barriers to FFDM within district governance assembled from across the three country studies.

4.4 Barriers to FFDM within district governance and planning at the local level

The authors set out to apply a problem-driven political economy framework to local decision-making processes in three separate sites; the problem being, in the case of the three ACCRA districts, a lack of FFDM within structures of district governance. As described above, reasons for this are diverse and context-driven. However, as documented in Section 3, a large degree of overlap exists between structural and institutional variables, actors, and stakeholders that shape decision-making at district level. In analysing findings from the three DDPs, three common political economy obstacles to FFDM are identified:

i) The top-down nature of prioritization and spending. Each of the districts profiled in ACCRA's research exhibits a distinct lack of agency in the ability of local 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, the vast majority of 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 solely to these five areas) has largely discouraged opportunities for multi-disciplinary 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 cannot be ascribed.

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

⁴ For more detailed ACCRA assessments of district government and country reports see Artur et al 2012 for Mozambique, Amsalu & Ludi 2012 for Ethiopia, and sMuhumuza & Jones 2012 for Uganda

under-developed district like Kotido, revenue is all but non-existent. Though specific policies and structures differ in relation to the Ethiopian and Mozambique contexts, both research sites refer to very similar issues of constraint in relation to budget and priority setting, as well as the top-down nature of planning (from both central and regional/provincial government).

This lack of agency and flexibility in allowing district government to identify, allocate, and act on its own needs is of key relevance to FFDM. For one, the rigidity of prioritisation and budgetary procedures means that there is very little scope for changes in the delivery of district activities. If a new approach is 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 (and with no central technical support).

iii) 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 shock and stress events. National planning procedures dictate that, should district governments experience an event (such as a hydro-meteorological event, geophysical hazard or a food security emergency) for which they are unaccustomed to and ill-prepared, all channels of financial resources and technical support be delivered through central government. Thus in effect, bypassing district level actors and absolving much of the responsibility and ownership in dealing with the situation on the ground.

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 crisis typically bypasses district government activities. In the case of Kotido (Uganda), the district's Chief Administrative Officer (in charge of developing its 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 they are in line with a district's disaster contingency planning or not).

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 three countries, 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.

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 district 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). 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 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) to take them forward within district planning.

Related to this is a distinct lack of awareness in the use and 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 on-going 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 socio-political 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 socio-political barriers in all three ACCRA sites, there are areas that can present clear entry points for promoting FFDM. Building on findings from the two phases of ACCRA's research, we propose five opportunities. These reflect clear 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 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 sectors actors. Each is competing to introduce new ways of working, promote new tools, set up new institutions, or encourage district government to priorities 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 (i.e. workshop 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 official's 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 socio-political context and understanding of the reasons for past failure. It also needs to reflect the needs and priorities of district officials, and most importantly that they feel the benefits of 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 explore new and innovative ways in sharing knowledge, and overcoming the uni-modal natural 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

(see Suarez et al 2012 for an example of games applied in the context of Community Based Adaptation).

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

At present, district-level planning operates solely on the basis of a 'normal year'. 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, requiring district government to commence a lengthy process of justification and reporting (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 make-up. Yet in practice these 'Visions' act as little more than reference points, and seldom inform DDP development. In the case of Kotido, 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 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.

5.3 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. 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 against in terms of 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.

5.4 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 the 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. 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 context relevant and applicable to the local environment as possible 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 (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 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 Political Economy Analysis (PEA) can prove invaluable in identifying opportunities in engaging with suitable institutional and socio-political structures.

6 Conclusions

A synthesis of ACCRA's two phases of research points to the failure of sub-national development plans to account for change and uncertainty across its three country sites. Findings reveal significant institutional and socio-political 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, including: 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 the local 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 socio-political 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; incremental change. Importantly, tools to encourage flexible decision-making or scenario planning can (where relevant) support adaptive capacity and encourage the principles of FFDM. However, to have meaningful progress in promoting FFDM will more likely require many these underlying barriers to be addressed head-on. This can only be achieved if all levels of governance are targeted and engaged; transformational change.

Crucially, institutional and socio-political barriers to adaptation are areas that have, as of yet, not received a large degree of attention within both academic and 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 the local level. The paper points to a number of opportunities in starting this discussion, focusing 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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Annex A. Country contexts

Figure 2. Socio-economic profiles of ACCRA countries and sites⁵

	Ethiopia	Mozambique	Uganda
Population (mn as of 2011)	84.7 (2011)	23.9	34.5
GDP (\$ per capita)/GDP growth (as of 2011)	394 / 7%	423 / 7%	488 / 6.7%
HDI ranking (out of 193)	174	184	161

	Gemechis	Guijá	Kotido
Population	184,032	75,303	218,500
GDP (pc)/GDP growth			

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 174th out of 187 countries.

The study in Ethiopia was conducted in 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 rainfed 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 3 hour 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 disturbs the normal agricultural calendar and cause

⁵ Sites listed are only depicted for Phase II of ACCRA research

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 5 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). Rainfed 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, flooding however 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 and 26 °C and the district is characterized by low and irregular rainfall (Administrative Post Nalazi).

Uganda - *Kotido, Uganda*

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, characterized by chronic poverty and historical marginalization. Eighty percent 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 relief food to 140,000 people in 2011⁶. According to the 2002 census figures, Kotido has a population of 218,500 people with a high illiteracy rate of 12% for males, 3% for females, and 4% average adult literacy (the national average literacy rate is 49%).

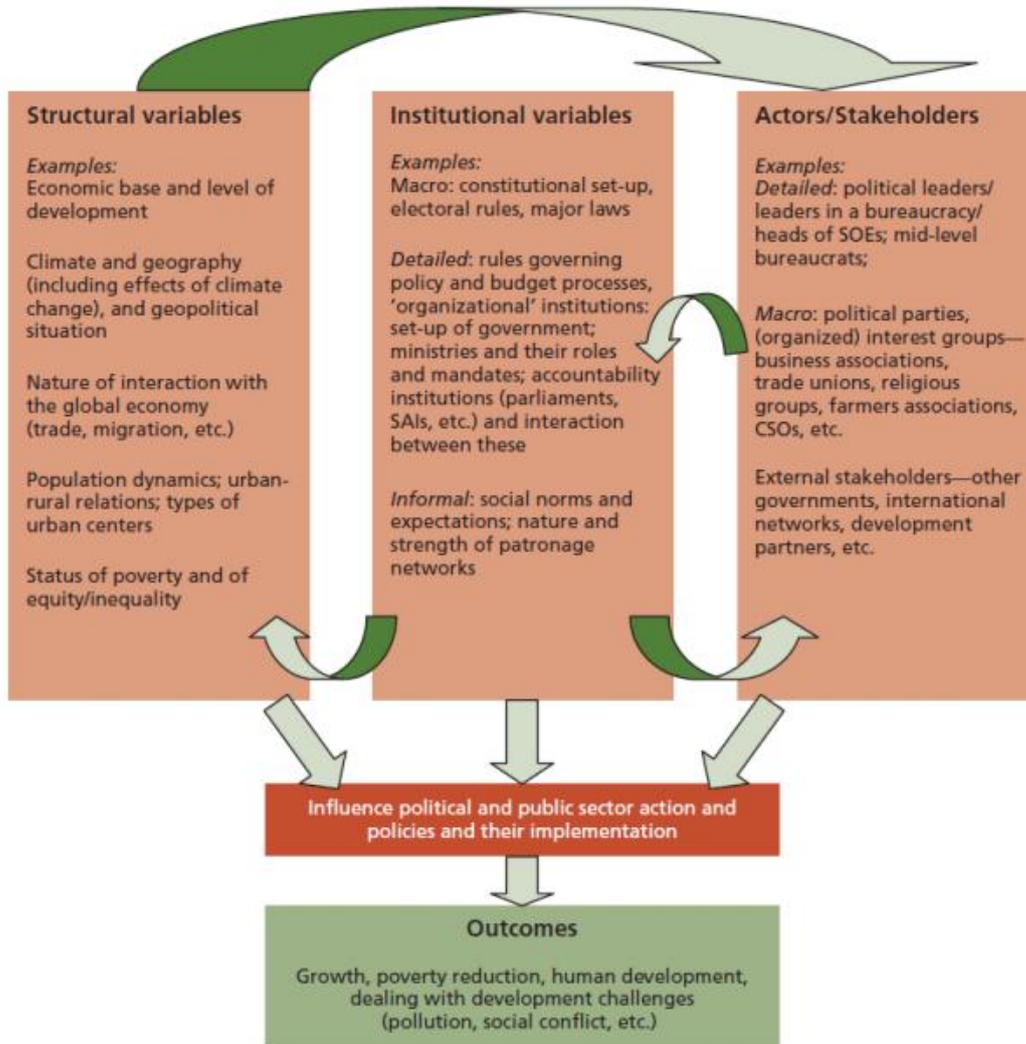
Kotido is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups including the Dodoth, Jie, Labwor and Ik. The majority of these groups engage in pastoral livelihoods, complemented in some parts by agricultural cultivation (the subject of historical focus and increasing government attention). Issues of conflict and 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 and 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.

⁶ The Republic of Uganda (2012), *Uganda Humanitarian Profile 2012*, Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Kampala.

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 characterized by daily temperatures ranging from 20 to 35 degrees centigrade, and short rainfall (March-August) averaging 519mm per annum and a longer dry season (November-March).

Annex B. World Bank problem driven political economy framework



Source: Fritz et al (2009)