

Civil society organisations in international climate change negotiations: A case study from Tanzania

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Abstract

Climate change is now considered as one of the most serious global threat to sustainable development. Currently, knowledge is plentiful on how to adapt to climate change and build resilience to its impacts, but putting that expertise into practice remains a problem around the world, especially in the least developed countries. This study seeks to contribute to empirical evidence on the barriers that constrain civil society organisations (CSOs) in developing countries to facilitate and promote compliance on international climate actions including nationally determined contributions (NDCs). The aim is to identify practical examples to support international initiatives under the Paris Agreement that would support adaptation in developing countries with appropriate actions. The study used in-depth semi structured interviews to 40 experts of environmental management, natural resources, climatology, and meteorology, and community development from Tanzania, to investigate the country's barriers and how has the government attempted to overcome them. The results indicate absence of rightful solutions and their relevance to the local situation that support and explicitly recognise the role of non-state actors to sustainable development solutions. The experts argued that current mechanisms that could increase active involvement and representation of CSOs lack clear specification on how non-state actors could be taken on-board when conducting in-country reviews for the climate change processes. These findings have implications on how to better integrate non-state actors in international climate change negotiations.

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Introduction

Globalisation is known to broaden the range of problems including environmental change. As these problems are escalating, the capacity of governments expected to address them is increasingly strained (Chen et al., 2009). This in turn has brought a remarkable decline in the role of states as the agent for environmental governance (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006; Marshall et al., 2017). The fall of the leading role of governments as key actors to curtail the most pressing environmental problems have rendered a growing recognition of non-state actors like companies, NGOs, federal states, provinces, regions and cities and individuals to be an integral part in negotiating and implementing solutions to environmental problems (Nasiritousi et al., 2016). One area where cooperation and a wide range of governance activities by non-state actors has been identified as particularly crucial is climate change action (O'Brien, 2015; Ostrom, 2014). Recent research for example reveals a growing number of non-state actors participating as observers in climate change negotiations (Abbott, 2012; Nasiritousi and Linnér, 2014). While states are increasing delivering inadequate commitments in international climate negotiations, non-state actors are expected to play a more pronounced role (Andonova et al., 2009; Hjerpe and Linnér, 2010).

The progress made in international climate change negotiations has brought to the front the emphasis of non-state actors. Since the onset of Paris Agreement (PA), the subsequent Conference of Parties (CoP) meetings have made it clear the need to seek more meaningful participation of non-state actors. This however, does not intend to scrap governments from their dominant role in the governance that is required to successfully address large-scale problems of collective action that would be required to address major environmental problems such as climate change (Marshall et al., 2017). There is much information already on involvement of non-state actors in global governance especially from developed countries. Little emphasis however, has been placed to examine what and how non-state actors have been successful in playing key roles at local, national and regional governance levels, and more precisely how such actors are fulfilling their duties in the countries of sub Saharan Africa. Even if international bodies such as the UNFCCC are aware of the their diverse roles of non-state actors (NSAs) including information sharing, capacity building and implementation and rule setting across the whole policy setting (Andonova et al., 2009), little is known on how they influence policy makers to take actions independent of states in developing world.

With increasing growing awareness on the impacts of climate change on economies and human development, a recent trend in governance is favouring inclusion of multiple actors especially Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and private sectors over state-centred governance (Salamon et al., 2003). Over the past years studies that have explored the influence of non-state actors in environmental governance have focused on influential NGOs (Vormedal, 2008) while paying less attention to marginalised groups (Schroeder, 2010). Most of the marginalised groups are in large part represented by CSOs. The engagement of CSOs in climate adaptation is still at an early stage. Nonetheless, greater involvement of CSOs as viewed in academic literature could help increase support for climate making processes (Bernauer et al., 2016). This implies that some of these non-state actors might have been overlooked on climate change governance issues.

This article builds on experiences of non-state actors in Tanzania, particularly CSOs. The article adopts the definition of CSOs from Scholte (2007) who stated that CSOs are voluntary associations institutionally separate from the state (government), which seek to influence policy-making processes or the rules that govern them, while not pursuing political office or direct economic profit. Interestingly, the article seeks to examine whether the Tanzanian government has granted CSOs access and opportunity to the international climate policy process especially negotiations under the auspices of UNFCCC and other international bodies dealing with climate change politics. Furthermore, the article review and discuss participation of CSOs in the meeting of parties, lobby government, prepare policy reports and their interaction with the public and media. The underlying hypothesis is whether CSOs as key non-state actors in Tanzania have a capacity and are a significant part of political landscape and on which premised could these institutions push for achievement of sustainable development goals by addressing issues related to climate change adaptation.

Methods

The present study employed interviews with 40 experts from CSOs, government officials, research organisations and bureaucrats. The interviews were conducted in the form of semi-structured questions where several queries regarding current and future interests of CSOs in climate change negotiations, needs and expectations, networks and institutions of which they are part, roles in global climate politics were included in an explorative manner. These

interviews were conducted on face to face. On average, the interviews took less than one hour and were conducted in Swahili. The interview respondents were also asked to identify other potential interviewees. The study also used open source research exercise to identify the leading CSOs in Tanzania that were active in climate governance processes. With this high level information, programmes and individuals who could be potential subjects for interview were identified. These key informants provided further information on programmes where non state actors have taken active role, and also key insights into barriers and capacity of CSOs in designing NDCs. During interviews, care was taken to ensure that the respondents are clear with what NDCs and SDGs mean at local context. While Tanzania like any other developing countries explicitly do intend roles for their Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) in relation to their NDCs, the lack of clarity as to the types of actions that the country have in mind makes it was an obstacle to the framing of questions to respondents. Although the interview instrument was designed to at least make a reference to plans to use the instrument, absence of details on how this could be used was another obvious to the interviewing process. This could imply that there still uncertainties as to how the NDCs and perhaps SDGs can help them meet their pledges.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Awareness and perceptions of CSOs

Interviews revealed a general awareness of international climate negotiations by the people working in CSOs. However, it became clear that CSOs receive little attention by the government when it come to the issues related to international climate change politics. While some respondents only consider being given enough details regarding climate change negotiations, others perceived that a lack of institutional bridges at national level that could integrate non-state actors and their contribution towards implementing climate change agenda is a big problem. Compelling evidence on how CSOs have already built in-country alliance or forums for alignment of sustainable development and climate agendas was lacking. This however was not seen as great issue by some of the respondents who mentioned existence of an alliance of CSOs that deal with climate change issue. The alliance is called Climate Forum —also known as the Tanzania Civil Society Forum on Climate Change, is an association of civil society organizations committed to work on climate change in their own programs, as well as working collectively on advocacy to improve responses to Climate Change in Tanzania. This could in part be attributed to the working nature of most of the non-state actors in Tanzania

where they tend to work in isolation despite being addressing similar environmental problems. On the other hand, this might be attributed to a belated action of the state to integrate non-state actors in most of the activities related to climate change and sustainable development and accredit them with some authoritative powers that could facilitate their model of operations. The contributions of CSOs to the national implementation of SDGs and NDCs remained ambiguous as explained during interviews. Nearly 75% of respondents reported that unlike in developed countries, CSOs here in Tanzania are seldom a major part of formulation, negotiation and policy implementation at local level. There is no mechanisms in place, as mentioned by key informants to track the activities done by CSOs as far as implementation of NDCs and SDGs is concerned. This however, could be addressed in future but taking actions at this stage would benefit much. None of the CSOs were mentioned to have an advisory status or being accredited to participate and take part in the UNFCCC procedural meetings and sessions.

3.2 Access of CSOs to climate change negotiations

Information collected during interviews and further information acquired from secondary sources especially unpublished reports demonstrate large variations in levels of access and participation of CSOs in climate change negotiations. Over 80% of interview respondents indicated that a substantial fraction of CSOs that focus on environmental issues have never participated in the processes that lead to climate negotiations at national level. Among those CSOs with at least a non-zero participation, and these were the one especially based in Dar es Salaam, which is the capital and main business city of Tanzania, their access varied by more than four orders of magnitude. Procedure barriers to access include lack of structure and mechanisms that could bring them in the climate processes at national level, and a lack of exposure to international climate change issues. A vast majority of interview respondents mentioned that hierarchies within government bodies and agencies responsible for climate change issue create obstacles for many CSOs to access and get involved climate negotiations. Key informants revealed that despite the CSOs in upcountry regions of Tanzania being active in addressing environmental problems, they are very poorly represented, some are often entirely absent from participation in initiatives related to climate negotiations. When asked about mutual trust and partnership, over two-thirds of respondent mentioned that this has not been built to a stage that could enhance some kind of agreement regarding existence of CSOs.

Results were mixed on how well CSOs would ensure their strategies are monitored and reviewed with a view to increasing their ambition towards climate governance and make them stronger. Interview results show less inclusion of CSOs in the preparation strategies for the UNFCCC meetings and related processes. A number of problems were mentioned to be key obstacle for CSOs to fully exert their influence towards processes of climate negotiation at national level and eventually at global level. Capacity to identify and develop projects among key personnel in many CSOs was relatively weak in many contexts. Many respondents highlighted the importance of building capacity specifically of those CSOs that are farther from where most of climate actions often take place at national level because their contributions will improve national and regional responses to climate change including adherence to Paris agreement and in preparations of NDCs. Building capacity at local level was also believed to be necessary for there to be distributed capacity around the country in order to have locally tailored responses to climate change and provide a link to sustainable development. Absence of right structure for making CSOs a reality for climate governance was also perceived as necessary to overcome a tendency of state actors to dominate most of the actions related to climate negotiations. A few interviewees explicitly raised concerns about the particular limited access of CSOs to climate governance as a need to build their capacity. Absence of fully consideration of CSOs in processes supervised by the UNFCCC at the national level points to a need for state actors to consider and value role of group of actors as main multipliers of integrating climate change activities into planning that are geared for sustainable development. This in turn would lead to progress towards implementation of international instruments for climate change in incremental ways.

3.3 Incorporation of CSOs in planning

Interviews show absence of tools and framework that could have been used to incorporate non-state actors in planning and implementation of SDGs and NDCs. Many key informants highlighted that only few personnel from CSOs occasionally are invited to participate in planning process based on their expertise and connections with officials from the climate change focal office in the country. In other words, many respondents argued that the interaction between government and CSOs in climate change issues is not strong and does appear sporadically. This has many consequences, including making CSOs as passive players in implementation of climate change activities. Most interview participants raised concerns on

how to leverage CSOs and other capacities in the country to help implementation of climate agenda. Promoting practical partnership between CSOs and the government is not clear. Such partnerships however, are crucial for helping national authorities to create innovations for sustainable development that can be put into practice quickly. Some key informants suggested that they should be matchmaking events that will be held. Such events would bring together representatives from universities, research institutions and businesses, as well as policy-makers and practitioners from the field of development cooperation. The meetings will provide them with the opportunity to work on their joint proposals from an early stage. This ensures that multiple actors come together in such a way as to allow involvement in cooperation projects related to climate and sustainable development. Nearly 60% of respondents reiterated that for CSOs to be well involved in climate governance and especially at international level, the negotiation team should not only include a limited number of accredited NGOs, universities and business, but also should have representatives from CSOs. This would make it inclusive.

3.4 Contribution of CSOs in adaptation activities

Very few of the CSOs mentioned by respondents had any programmes that were specifically aimed at adaptation activities. While the focus of these organisations is on environment and sustainability broadly, it is an example of avenue that could link them directly with the state. These organisations as described during interviews could use this opportunity to actively support implementation of NDCs and other mechanisms related to climate change. Many of the CSOs referred in this study deliver specific environmental protection programmes, but are themselves fashioned as networks of individuals who are primary participants, with an often role with the UNFCCC focal office. In other words, it is notable that many organisations engaged in environmental protection rely on small cadre of staff members who have expertise that could be trusted by the state. Key informants reported that it is not a rare occurrence for individuals working in CSOs to be involved in more than one organisation, a thing which however restrict their fully participation in particular programmes related to adaptation activities. There is both agreement and disagreement among some of these CSOs based on their technical expertise. It was learnt during interviews that climate planning is highly institutionalised. This has direct impact for these organisations to intermingle with government in different forums where priorities, targets and initial approaches are discussed. This becomes a barrier for CSOs to actively take part in international climate negotiations starting from local level.

3.5 Evolution of CSOs and climate governance

The majority of respondents agreed that over the last two decades, CSOs in Tanzania has evolved significantly. Many respondents were optimistic that these organisations are flourishing. However, some few respondents were pessimistic with existence of CSOs and mentioned that the underlying factors for an increase in number of CSOs especially those dealing with environmental issues is not much influenced by the motives to combat these problems but rather driven by availability of funding grants and project activities. According to respondents, many of these CSOs are weak, elite driven and their spread is uneven as they are commonly based in urban areas. Interestingly, it was mentioned during interviews that most of CSOs operate offline, a thing that limit their wide involvement in global governance processes. Over half of CSOs mentioned by respondents were environmental protection organisations. This actually would be an added advantage for them to reflect the most numerous observer constituents to the UNFCCC process overall (UNFCCC, 2014). An interesting trend during interview was that despite their active and potential role, members or representatives of CSOs are less included in the delegation which is part of national delegation to the UNFCCC conferences. At least many respondents understood that global climate agreements are discussed during those conference and hence their less inclusion means putting them off in this process. In many respects, interviews show that the capacity of CSOs to strategically engage with both local and international influence is limited.

4. Discussion

The involvement of CSOs in policy making at both local and global level has increased remarkably in the past years. Research show that CSOs have invested in time and effort in gaining access to and participating in as well as trying to exert their influence in policy making (Bernauer et al. 2016). While this trend is increasingly being noticed, its widespread is limited especially in developing countries like Tanzania where CSOs are still commonly seen as organisation outside the government. Their role as explained by the interviews conducted for this study is still far from being appreciated. This might be attributed to many factors, including among others poor organisation for the CSOs, lack of expertise, little funding, and low support

from government agency. Interestingly, this slow pace is also attributed to conflicting interests where in some instances, CSOs are viewed as watchdog and monitor of state by the government.

The findings of this study show that CSOs could play a major role in international climate processes provided that the government will grant them access. The government as often being explained in literature should remain as the leading agency when it comes to global governance and especially for environmental challenges such as climate change. Importantly, the government should regard CSOs as crucial partners, rather than a substitute where a lot of conflicts would eventually happen. While hierarchical problems are mounting up, it is clear that inclusion of CSOs improves people's assessment of transparency and representational quality of climate governance to a considerable degree (Bernauer et al., 2016).

Although CSOs seem to have provide information that could form the basis for climate negotiations (Bernauer and Betzold, 2012; Burstein and Hirsh, 2007), the findings of this study depict a different picture. The study uncovered that the government has not provided the necessary incentives to grant CSOs access to negotiations in the form of participating in delegations. As it is now, the interaction of CSOs with national institutes is sporadic. This poses a critical gap that needs to be addressed urgently as presence of CSOs would bridge the information asymmetric between government actors and non-government actors. This in turn would make government to gain from including CSOs as these organisations have an advantage in providing policy advice, scientific inputs and information that the government might be lacking regarding the issue at hand (Sarewitz, 2004).

With the current social-political condition in Tanzania, CSOs are not well positioned to provide policy advice and expertise of technical nature. Although NGOs in general are known to dedicate much of their resources in information gathering and dissemination, and have built up expertise in many of the scientific, economic and social disciplines related to sustainable development (Böhmelt, 2013; Gough and Shackley, 2001), this aspect is not well obvious in the Tanzanian case. Many of these organisations are still struggling and depend very much on feedback from government agencies. This on one hand makes it hard for CSOs to provide

adequate data which is not provided by the government. Despite being close to local communities, lack of funding and capacity has rendered it difficult for CSOs to adequately fill the gap that is created by the weakness inherent in the government structure (URT, 2012).

As is common in such studies (e.g. Bernauer et al., 2016; Scholte, 2007; Schroeder, 2010), the findings of this study suggest that, all else equal, increased involvement of CSOs could help the government adopt and implement more ambitious climate policies. This however, should go hand in hand with increasing capacity of people involved in negotiations especially those that could be selected from CSOs. At the international level, Tanzania committed to important mitigation measures especially after ratifying the Paris Agreement, but post implementation of these measures is likely to face multiple domestic obstacles. The government could attempt to leverage increased popular legitimacy among citizens from stronger CSO involvement in order to counter opposition against mitigation measures by influential industrial interests. This opportunity is particularly relevant given the finding of this study that the positive effects of CSOs in advice has not yet been seen. From the perspective of CSOs, the results suggest that it might be feasible to further their objectives by pushing for stronger involvement in climate governance, as the government might benefit from the latter through increased public support for its policies, which in turn could enhance the credibility of its international commitments.

While the results suggest that the implementation of climate policies including NDCs and SDGs can signal a significant acceleration to fulfilling global goals, this process may come with several policy and financing challenges that could increase the limitation of participations of non-state actors. As in has happened in regions that have successful integrated non state actors, a big share of investments would need to be directed capacity for CSOs and other non-state actors to fully participate. This may indicate the challenges associated with how non-state actors operate, how they identify funding opportunities and eventually the way they mobilise and direct those funds in climate change activities. This is an obvious problems with local CSOs in Tanzania, where they still operate in rudimental way with little technical and financial capacity. This is in large would accelerate a need for formulating policies that would suit a well anticipated and predictable investment environment focused in particular to climate change adaptation and mitigation investments.

Inadequate initiatives for strategic designed to place CSOs in a better position to cooperate with state actors is a salient issue that need to be addressed in future research. While the current work is limited to provide an authoritative conclusion, it is clear that empirical works that will investigate the strategic use of space and engagement of CSOs with state will provide information that could enhance their role in environmental governance. Although the notation of inclusivity of non-state actors in state dialogue is still a new phenomenon and has not yet yielded expected impact, concerted effort should be taken to increase local ownership that will create spacer for these organisations to operate effectively. Governments in developing countries should clarify and facilitate the enabling environment for CSOs to participate in international climate change dialogue and processes. The Tanzania case show that much of the work carried out by non-state actors are unfortunately of little use by the public. They are simply published and remain in shelves until when needed by the government or research groups. This makes an open question that goes father even to the delegation that usually attend the UNFCCC meetings. The present study suggest that in order to enhance the role of non-state actors, the delegation team should be well established and capable of receiving and synthesizing contribution not only from state agencies but also from non-state actors including CSOs.

A number of caveats might have affected the results of this study. First, they are based on a sample of experts who possess diverse knowledge, some of which is less related to climate change issues. Consequently, the implications of this study may not be generalised as capacity building on climate change issue is an ongoing processes, of which new experts may emerge that would give a more comprehensive picture. Second, the results provide evidence of situation on non-state actors by considering CSOs only. It would have been useful to have interviewed a broad variety of non-state actors including business, private sectors, academia and many others. Still, this study sheds new light on the impact of non-state actors in international climate change issues and governance.

Conclusion

As the role of state actors in solving escalating environmental problems such as climate change is increasingly stretched, it is crucial that non-state actors have to take over. This however, will succeed if there would be mechanisms and institutions to ensure that these non-state actors

especially the CSOs produce solutions to these problems. The findings of this study contributes to knowledge on how this might be achieved. This article has produced evidence that when CSOs are more linked to among each other, an avenue for more inclusive dialogue will be opened up. This in turn would boost CSOs to operate as conduits for disseminating information on activities and issues to complement government efforts. The change of CSOs to pursue specific issue and interest will also increase and this will make these organisations engage closer in supplying solution to challenges.

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