

**ACC DAR – Adapting to Climate Change in Coastal Dar Es Salaam**

**Investigation of Dar Es Salaam’s institutional activities related to climate change**

(Authors: prof. Gabriel Kassenga, prof. Stephen Mbuligwe – ARDHI University)

**ASSESSMENT REPORT**

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**1. Methodological premise**

Before making my comments to the results of the survey dealing with how Dar Es Salaam’s public officials cope with climate change and adaptation issues, I’d like to make a premise I believe it’s worth it in such a scientific and learning context.

First of all, I’d emphasize the practice of intensive policy and knowledge transfer the ACC DAR project has activated among scholars and public officials coming from different contexts and cultures. This is a major and valuable feature of the whole process this program has triggered between partners in an international perspective.

«Cities are increasingly connected through and produced by complex relations of teaching, learning, and cooperation. These relations involve urban actors thinking and acting regionally, nationally, and, increasingly, globally. While cities compete, urban policy actors, from politicians to public and private policy professionals to representatives of a range of activist organizations, also cooperate, sharing ideas, expertise, policy models, and best practices through overarching state structures, national and inter- national organizations, interpersonal contacts, and fact-finding visits» (McCann, 2008:886).

Scholars and other professionals are actually involved, through this project, in a learning process where policy and knowledge transfer is a central issue. Nevertheless, such a learning and cooperating context aims to subvert traditional methods and procedures of “top-down”, one-sided knowledge and technology transfer from the global North, as Africa has been experimenting in its long-term history of exogenous, donor-dependent actions aimed to improve development and modernization of the country.

European scholars involved in this project aim to basically understand, in one of the extreme and therefore clear-cut contexts where climate change is producing its massive effects, how adaptation strategies may work in order to cope with such a complex, global emergency.

But the point here is not just that Dar Es Salaam is such an “extreme” context – and like all extreme cases has the potential to rise questions and issues in a more general perspective – but also that here people have cumulated over the years, through their everyday experience, such a thick and articulated knowledge about this phenomenon that Dar can be acknowledged as a propulsive node in the global network of policy and knowledge transfer involving cities and practices in the global North as well.

In these terms, I would say that this learning and cooperation process works as an “assemblage”, a messy and complex context where a few things are given for granted, and multiplicity and fluidity are the constituent forms of the “reality” people here are trying to deal with, each one with her/his skills, background and sensitivity.

In such an assemblage, knowledge typically travels and is shared through a variable network of actors. One feature of such a network I think it’s worth highlighting here is that the practices of experts constitute global spaces of emulation and competition.

In general, what counts in such a space of emulation and competition are “best practices”: if one wants to study, let’s say, brownfield revitalization, usually refers to Germany and some paradigmatic cases of brownfield environmental recovery carried out there.

We all know, after some years of experimentation of urban and environmental policies within the European Union, that best practice is a tricky term, since often it refers to a standardized, continental “recipe” for policy-making, not really open to contextual knowledge and innovation. Now, I’m mentioning this in a persuasive and rhetoric perspective, since there’s a potential, here, to make up all basic conditions in order to experiment innovative measures and methodologies of adaptation to climate change. I’m not arguing that Dar Es Salaam should become a best practice in the field of climate adaptation strategies, but more simply I’m saying that in this specific context many things could be done, a whole and original bunch of knowledge has been accumulated that it would be worth making it available to different policy and research networks.

All these issues come to the forefront through the scrutiny of the first results of the survey the local research team has been doing with municipal officers.

One major feature of this report – as it comes out of the structure of the questionnaire itself – is the capillary knowledge many people working in different units of local institutions have accumulated through their everyday working routines and thanks to their territorially-based point of observation of facts and problems.

The composition of technical units, as it comes out of the survey, is very articulated in terms of a good mix of skills and competencies of people involved, as well as in terms of gender mix, where women sometimes occupy leading positions in working units and projects.

This makes me think of local institutions in terms of “human infrastructures”, whereas this expression aims at stressing the double-some nature of the technical apparatus, not just delivering expert knowledge throughout rational and standardized procedures and protocols, but also coping with practical problems in a mindful and often wise manner. In such a perspective, I would argue that «activities of expertise» don’t just belong to «an all-pervasive web of ‘social control’ and bureaucratic administration, but they also enact different kinds of practices aiming at governing through countless, often competing local tactics of education, persuasion, inducement, management, incitement, motivation and encouragement» (McCann, 2008:889) of what happens on the ground

everyday.

## **2. Remarks to the results of the investigation**

The survey's results can be interpreted in different ways. Two are worth highlighting here: almost all respondents said that no policy specifically intended to address peri-urban problems is on the political agenda, at the moment, and that public officials' awareness about climate change issues is still insufficient. And this can be paralleled to another result of the survey, which is that several cases of autonomous adaptation strategies can be observed in the peri-urban areas these people have been asked about.

As for the first result, the fact that no specific policy has been designed and implemented to address climate change issues in peri-urban areas doesn't necessarily mean that no knowledge (theoretical and especially empirical) is available on such a theme; on the contrary, according to the composition in terms of education, skills, age and gender of municipal technical units and – as far as I can understand from what has been reported – to the information many interviewees give about climate change impacts on peri-urban settlements, we might tell that knowledge has been produced over the years but it needs to be worked out and organized into operative frames to be used properly and effectively. So far, policy design comes to the forefront as the main field where such a dispersed knowledge might be organized and acted out. This may improve awareness on the side of public officials and limit the perception of a “void” which is never a good point to start from.

As for the second one, the report says that many cases of autonomous adaptation measures to cope with climate change effects can be observed (crops, livestock and housing are the main fields where these adaptation measures are being taken, especially to deal with flooding risks). There's a gap, here, worth noticing: people working in the institutions declare themselves insufficiently aware and competent about climate change impacts, nevertheless they acknowledge measures of adaptation to the problem through their everyday working routines and experiences. Again, it's a matter of framing, organizing and addressing such a valuable but dispersed set of knowledge: participation

comes to the forefront, here, as the main activity to work out and organize all this material.

I think it's worth putting these two issues together as each may retro-act on the other, in a positive way. On one side, there's local, common knowledge, built up empirically by people living in the peri-urban and coping with everyday problems due to climate change; on the other, there's the capacity of policy designers to figure out problems, select and frame them into operationalizing schemes of investigation and action. The nexus between these two spheres seems very weak at the moment, but each of them – as the survey demonstrates – has the potential to put up effective and fruitful relations.

As for local knowledge, I would not necessarily limit this concept to residents of the peri-urban: on the contrary, even public officials, in their multidimensional condition (they're both technicians AND residents), contribute to produce it, and this could be a valuable resource to disseminate into policy-design and policy-making practices addressing climate change problems in peri-urban Dar Es Salaam. In this perspective, we might say that public officials, in a policy-making setting, would work as “multi-dimensional actors”, in between their technical, institutional position and their everyday life experience. I'm stressing this double-some feature since the relation between expert and common knowledge, in such a case, is crucial and I think is to be enhanced in all possible ways, starting from technicians.

Even if not included in the report I've been asked to comment, there's another point worth highlighting, here, which is the outcome of participatory actions carried out in the project's first phase with some groups of residents. Reading the report (see ACC DAR Interim Narrative Report 2011-2012) and discussing with my colleagues involved in the activity, I understand that a lot of basic information came out of the “oppressed theatre” actions carried out to stimulate participation of residents of peri-urban areas about climate change issues.

Through dramatization, people put up on scene their practical knowledge about climate change impacts on their everyday life and it seems that “out there” there's a whole bunch of first-hand material to be investigated and framed into possible courses of

action. This is a further, important test of the potential in terms of knowledge and living experience people might have accumulated on such an issue, that's why I believe that the focus on participation this project makes is truly important in terms of policy design.

According to the participation activity's first outcomes, there would be no standard solution to mitigate climate change impacts on peri-urban settlements, and the need for an overall framework to address these changes in a planning perspective, has to be tempered and balanced by a truly experimental attitude towards innovations coming out of everyday life. Social practices as a source of knowledge and action are as important as technical knowledge about how climate change occurs, about water supply problems, agricultural issues and so forth.

One final remark I'd like to make is about capacity building, one major goal of the whole project. In this mutual learning setting, people are doing efforts to basically give shape and direction to their respective knowledge and capability to act. And this is very hard to do, in any critical context. Nonetheless, it seems to me is that this actor network may develop capabilities on both sides, for local actors to implement effective policies to address climate change in peri-urban areas, and for non-local actors involved in a policy and knowledge transfer network to focus on issues and practices occurring in their domestic contexts in an innovative way.

This may happen since this research and action context has the potential to challenge a whole bunch of "given for granted" issues and, as we all know, this is a valuable point of view for any scholar interested in dealing with contemporary urban and environmental phenomena. At all scales, in any city of the world.

## References

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