United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

ACPC
Centre africain pour la politique en matière de climat

Africa Climate Talks

Climate Change and Development in Africa Post COVID-19: Emerging Policy Considerations

Webinar Series – Session 1, 9 July 2020

11am to 2pm GMT

Concept Note

Introduction

Covid-19 is a zoonotic disease. There are clear links between health and the environment. Biodiversity loss and proximity to wildlife can create the conditions for illnesses to spread. Research suggests that the emergence of new human diseases is closely linked to loss and degradation of ecosystems and habitats, which in turn is driven by climate change, resource extraction, urban and agricultural expansion and pollution. Rising temperatures have been linked with changes in the range of malarial mosquitoes, and the spread of malaria and the Zika virus. The extent to which growing human pressures on the natural environment is responsible for zoonoses remains the subject of ongoing study. Other environmentally related illnesses such as chronic lung and heart conditions due to long term exposure to pollution make viruses like Covid-19 even more dangerous. However, biodiversity can act as a buffer against the spread of pathogens. Healthy ecosystems translate into resilient and healthy societies.

The fifth Assessment Report (AR5) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) notes that the significance of vector organisms in transmitting infection diseases, and further that climate change may alter the distribution of vector species, depending on whether conditions are favourable or unfavourable for their breeding places[1]. Even before the Corona virus outbreak, plans were in place to explore the links between biodiversity and climate change through a joint meeting (scheduled for May 2020, and now postponed) of the IPCC and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

In addition to global economies going into a recession, the world is facing two emergencies simultaneously – the Climate emergency and Covid-19. Suggest that we cannot afford to address climate change, biodiversity loss and economic crises at the same time is a false choice[2], all crises must be addressed at the same time. The climate emergency has been unfolding over many decades, and the first global response to it is enshrined in the United

[1] https://archive.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/tar/wg2/index.php?idp=358

[2] E.g. members of the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament have argued for the rolling back of environmental commitments by the European Union. https://ecrgroup.eu/article/ecr_group_we_need_to_put_pragmatism_first

Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change concluded in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Covid – 19 emergency, on the other hand, emerged only recently in December 2019, and was declared a global emergency in mid-January 2020. In a matter of weeks, Covid-19 has changed the world as we knew it. It has brought commerce to an almost complete standstill, locked down whole nations and quarantined whole populations indoors in accordance with the Siracusa Principles[3] . The response to Covid – 19 has been an unprecedented mobilization of society, business and state resources.

There are many parallels between Covid – 19 and climate change, and many lessons can be learned from the Covid response. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that Covid - 19 could cause Africa's economies will contract by between 1.8 – 2.6%, potentially pushing 27 million people into extreme poverty[4]. At the time of writing, Covid-19 has infected more than 3 million people worldwide, with over 200,000 deaths. The World Health Organization estimates that climate change related disasters are responsible for 150,000 deaths/year, and this is projected to rise to 250,000/year by 2030. In April 2019, cyclone Idai struck 3 southern African countries (Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe) resulting in over a thousand deaths; 2,486 persons injured; 196,255 households displaced; and 2 968,895 persons affected[5]. Add to this more than 800,000 hectares of crops destroyed just before harvest, over 3000 classrooms and 45 health facilities flattened. This single event alone also caused more than $3 billion damage to the economies of the 3 countries[6]. These costings relate to physical damage caused by high impact climate events, but it is impossible to calculate the cost of secondary impacts such as physical and emotional well-being, food and water scarcity, and the spread of mosquito-borne and water-borne disease, displacement, migration and so on caused by such events.

Climate change will eviscerate economies. The direct economic impacts from climate change responses to the continent are underlined by the IPCC's 1.5°C Report which projects that global model pathways for limiting global warming to 1.5°C would involve annual average investment needs in the energy system of around US$ 2.4 trillion, representing about 2.5% of the world GDP, between 2016 and 2035. According to the Africa renewable energy Initiative (AREI) the African continent requires 300GW by 2030 in order to address only the energy access challenges.

Vulnerability to climate change is globally generalised and locally specific. This is to say that while everyone is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, developing countries are much more vulnerable because of the structural and historical factors which restrict their abilities to absorb the costs of climate related events such as droughts, floods and heatwaves, as well as to adapt their economies to operate efficiently and sustainably in a changing climate. They also have less ability to take advantage of the opportunities of responding to climate change – such as investment in clean renewable energy, climate

[3] Diego S. Silva, Maxwell J. Smith. Health and Human Rights 17/1 Commentary: Limiting Rights and Freedoms in the Context of Ebola and Other Public Health Emergencies: How the Principle of Reciprocity Can Enrich the Application of the Siracusa Principles

[4] https://www.uneca.org/publications/covid-19-africa-protecting-lives-and-economies

[5] African Climate Policy centre, April 2019.

[6] Building Back Better Workshop, October 2019.

proofing infrastructure, or adopting smart agriculture options – without external assistance. It is estimated that Covid-19 will cost the world economy up to 5% of GDP. Climate impacts in Africa are already costing most of the continent's economies between 3 and 5% of GDP annually[7], with some incurring losses of up to 10% of GDP. Thus, quite clearly, climate change already poses an even greater risk to lives, livelihoods and ecosystems than the Covid – 19 pandemics thus far. Yet the response to climate change has by and large been lacklustre. How do we understand these differences, and what is to be done to ensure that climate change receives the urgency it deserves?

Objective

Clearly, there are many lessons to be drawn from the COVID-19 responses. The Africa Climate talks in 2020 will be a series of webinars designed to stimulate a Pan African discourse aimed at contributing to the emergence of an African narrative on climate change and development drawing lessons from the pandemic and identifying the opportunities and lessons from COVID-19 that can be translated into policy directions by African decision makers in order to ensure climate informed reconstruction of the continents economies after the COVID pandemic. The talks will also seek to inform African positions in the construction of the global climate change policy and governance framework, starting with COP 26.

Structure

A partnership of African organizations including ACPC/AUC/AfDB and PACJA, in collaboration with international organizations including GGGI/WMO/ is thus convening a series of webinars over the next 8 weeks to begin a process of formulating African perspectives on resilience building post COVID-19.

Specific issues for discussion will include:

1. Exploring the linkages between climate change and zoonoses
2. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the climate change response based on lessons from the Covid-19 response
3. Impacts of Covid-19 on African public revenues and implications for Africa's NDC implementation
4. Key approaches to building climate change resilience in Africa- Lessons from Covid 19
5. Challenges and opportunities for financing climate actions post Covid-19

Speakers and panellists will be drawn from national, regional and continental institutions, intergovernmental organizations, academia, the African civil society and the private sectors.

[7] UNECA, African Climate Policy Centre