

d·i·e

Deutsches Institut für
Entwicklungspolitik



German Development
Institute

Climate Action

Harnessing the SDGs for Africa's Climate Policy

By Kennedy Mbeva
and Joanes Atela,
African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS)

The Current Column

of 25 March 2019

Harnessing the SDGs for Africa's Climate Policy

Bonn, 25.03.2019. The adoption of the Paris Agreement (PA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 marked a shift from negotiating to implementing climate policy. African countries submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as part of their commitment to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and in line with the SDGs. Moreover, the inclusion of Climate Action (SDG 13) closely links the SDGs to the NDCs.

The NDCs thus marked a decisive turn in the logic of international climate action by providing an opportunity for a bottom-up approach to the implementation of climate policy that reflected countries' national priorities and capabilities. They also enabled the most vulnerable countries to commit to action against climate change in spite of the entrenched North-South dichotomy of climate negotiations. The NDCs thus helped ushering in a proactive approach to a truly global climate policy. These developments have three major implications for climate policy of African countries, premised on the link between NDCs and SDGs.

First, an emerging theme in many African countries' NDCs was the request for implementation support. Most NDCs had conditional contributions, which identified further elements that could be implemented with additional international support, such as capacity building, technology development and transfer, and climate finance. While these have been mainstay issues advanced by African countries, NDCs provided an instrument where countries could specify these needs in detail. Support can therefore be targeted, for example by matching the areas identified with specific SDGs. As a co-benefit, support for implementation of the conditional elements would lead to greater ambition of the NDCs and concomitantly foster stronger linkage with SDGs.

Second, the changing landscape of international climate policy to include sub-state and non-state actors opens avenues for greater climate action. By identifying such actors, and the aspects they can engage in, NDCs are an important instrument to leverage actors focused on SDG themes, especially SDG 17 on Partnerships. This may also include broadening the scope for sources of climate finance, beyond the financial mechanisms developed under the UNFCCC. The African Development Bank and other multilateral banks have increasingly focused their attention on leveraging climate finance and clean energy technologies, for example through the Sustainable Energy Fund for Africa. Linking NDC implementation with SDG 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy could help raise levels of energy access across the continent, a key priority for many African countries.

The NDCs have thus brought to the fore key sectors

that were hitherto overlooked in policy implementation processes, thereby further strengthening linkages with the SDGs. For instance, rapid urbanisation in Africa elevates cities as major actors in addressing climate change. SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities brings this crucial connection into sharp focus. Joining transnational climate networks, which have proliferated over the past years, would allow African cities to engage with peers, exchange expertise and best practises, and build their capacity in addressing climate change. This would complement climate action at the national level.

Third, and crucial, is the need to strengthen diplomatic relations and efforts between African countries and the European Union (EU), especially in exploring how key features of the NDCs are supportive for the implementation of the SDGs. The EU has been a major partner in fostering climate policy in Africa. Climate change and energy were identified as the second priority of the recently launched AU-EU High Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation. By strongly linking climate change with access to sustainable energy, the initiative underscores the importance of approaching the implementation of the SDGs within the broader context of NDCs. Leveraging and retrofitting existing partnerships, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the African Union Commission, would also enable focusing on key priorities identified by African countries' NDC, such as agriculture.

Moreover, bilateral cooperation between research institutions in the EU and Africa can enhance mutual learning and innovative collaborative projects. The German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) closely collaborated in developing the NDC Explorer, a premier platform for analysis of NDCs. ACTS also hosted members of the DIE Postgraduate Training Programme in 2016/2017 to conduct research on the nexus between climate change and SDGs in Kenyan cities. Similar collaborations could strengthen understanding and cooperation between African countries and the EU.

African countries' approach to implementing their NDCs should generally seek to harness synergies with the SDGs. By identifying the various themes identified in their NDCs, and matching them with pertinent SDGs, African countries will get closer to realising their long-stated objective of taking climate action within a broader sustainable development agenda.