



OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND ACTION IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH IN AFRICA

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ABOUT ARIN

The Africa Research and Impact Network (ARIN) is a pioneering research and policy network that unites leading African scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to tackle critical development challenges (<https://www.arin-africa.org/>). ARIN's mission is to enhance the generation, sharing, and application of knowledge across the continent, fostering transdisciplinary research, facilitating impactful collaborations, and promoting evidence-based policy interventions. ARIN covers various thematic areas, including climate change, health, governance, and sustainable development. The network emphasizes a participatory approach, ensuring that research outcomes are academically rigorous, socially relevant, and actionable. This policy brief aligns with ARIN's commitment to advancing climate and health research in Africa. By capturing insights from diverse stakeholders and experts, the findings will inform policies and interventions that are both impactful and responsive to the continent's unique challenges.

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03

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The report's insights stem from the experiences of diverse stakeholders engaged in climate, health, and related fields. We are indebted to all those consulted for their significant contributions during the consultation process.

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Urgent Need for Integrated Health and Climate Action:

Despite the critical interconnections between climate change and health, only 0.5% of multilateral climate adaptation funds are allocated to the health sector. This highlights a pressing need to increase investments in climate-related health actions to develop robust National Health Resilience and National Adaptation Plans.

Dynamic Policy Landscape Presents Opportunities:

The climate and health policy landscape is evolving, with key moments like the 2015 Paris Agreement emphasizing integrated approaches. The recent launch of the Alliance for Transformative Action for Climate and Health (ATACH) by WHO has renewed global and regional ambitions for integrated climate and health policies, creating a solid foundation for transdisciplinary research and action.

Expanding but Uneven Stakeholder Engagement:

The number of stakeholders in the climate and health field is rapidly growing across Africa, but their distribution is uneven due to disparities in funding and structural challenges. Regional research and advocacy networks are crucial in bridging the gap between global guidelines and national actions, and increased funding and coordination for these networks can amplify their impact.

Research Gaps and Challenges in Knowledge Translation:

Current research in Africa predominantly focuses on climate impacts on specific diseases, but there is a lack of integrated solutions that consider broader social determinants of health. Moreover, the translation of research into practical policy recommendations is often weak, underlining the need for localized data collection tools and specialized knowledge translation units.

Nascent Capacity-Building Initiatives Require Strengthening:

While there are emerging efforts to build capacity in climate and health, they often lack depth and fail to address critical areas such as leadership and investment skills. To fully capitalize on international climate investment opportunities, there is a need to develop comprehensive capacity-building programs that include these essential skills.

BACKGROUND

The escalating severity of climate change is exerting increasing pressure on health-determining sectors, including agriculture, food security, energy, disaster risk management, and overall social conditions. Addressing these challenges necessitates a multi-sectoral approach that holistically considers the interconnectedness of these factors.

A significant shift has occurred in the climate and health policy landscape, with a growing emphasis on placing health at the core of climate change decision-making. This paradigm shift is essential for developing integrated and multi-sectoral National Health Resilience and National Adaptation Plans. Effective collaboration among researchers, policymakers, and implementation partners is crucial to address the complex interplay between climate and health.

However, despite the pressing need, such collaborations are still in their early stages, particularly in Africa. A stark illustration of this gap is evident in the allocation of resources, with only 0.5% of multilateral climate adaptation funds directed towards the health sector. This underfunding underscores the critical need for increased investment in climate-related health actions.

Funded by Wellcome, this study seeks to enhance our understanding of how collaborative platforms, such as Communities of Practice (CoPs), can effectively integrate health considerations into climate change policies.

METHODOLOGY

An initial scoping review of policy and academic documents, databases, 411 consultative webinars, and an online survey with 198 participants was conducted to assess the climate and health (C&H) research, policy, capacity-building, and stakeholder landscape. Building on this foundational analysis, in-depth consultations were undertaken through 12 regional focus group discussions (totaling 123 participants) and 25 in-depth key informant interviews to identify concrete examples of climate and health activities, collaborative models, and case studies with potential for scaling up to advance transdisciplinary (TDR) C&H research and action.

KEY RESULTS

Climate and Health Policy Landscape

The landscape of climate and health (C&H) policies is dynamic, characterized by pivotal moments that galvanize collective action at multiple levels. While prior global and regional declarations underscored public health resilience and broader environmental health, the 2015 Paris Agreement (PA) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) marked a turning point by emphasizing integrated approaches. Existing climate policies, as well as those in health-determining sectors such as energy and agriculture, identify key adaptation priorities for health and other areas. This provides a solid foundation for enhancing the integration of health considerations within climate policy and action.

The recently launched Alliance for Transformative Action for Climate and Health (ATACH) by the World Health Organization and Africa's position on climate and health have renewed ambition for integrated C&H policies. More than 83 countries globally have committed to the ATACH framework (30 of these being African nations) and are receiving guidance to develop Health National Adaptation Plans (HNAPs). Advocacy efforts are increasing the number of African countries developing HNAPs, with 17 countries engaged in national consultations on HNAPs by early 2024. These processes unite health-determining sectors, stimulating demand for and uptake of transdisciplinary collaborations and research evidence. Beyond HNAPs, several African countries possess sectoral policies in environment, energy, water, agriculture, and air quality, all of which directly or indirectly impact health outcomes.

The Climate and Health Stakeholders in Africa

The number of stakeholders engaged in climate and health (C&H) work is rapidly increasing. However, the stakeholders are unevenly distributed across regions, which is partly driven by funding allocation patterns, vulnerabilities, and other structural variables. Existing initiatives provide an opportunity for learning best practices for the evolving C&H field.

Policy and advocacy-based organizations, networks, and civil society alliances such as the ATACH Alliance, the Global Climate and Health Alliance (GCHA), the Africa Climate and Health Alliance (ACHA), AMREF, Climate Health Africa Network for Collaboration and Engagement (CHANCE) Network, and the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), among others, advocate for action at global and regional levels. These advocacy groups should enhance connections with stakeholders and initiatives focused on capacity building and research to effectively integrate transdisciplinary evidence into advocacy efforts.

Nevertheless, diverse stakeholders from advocacy, research, and capacity-building sectors are already forming collaborative alliances to capitalize on the C&H momentum. For instance, regional research and advocacy alliances/networks operating in several African countries are bridging the gap between global C&H guidelines and national/domestic action by leveraging technologies, expertise, partnerships, and innovative practices from around the world to support national efforts. Increasing funding and coordination for these regional networks can amplify their impact on transdisciplinary research (TDR), capacity strengthening, and implementation actions.

Climate and Health Research Landscape

The study reveals a predominant focus on specific climate impacts on diseases, particularly vector-borne and other infectious illnesses within existing research. While critical, this disease-centric approach may be insufficient in providing integrated solutions within complex African socioeconomic contexts characterized by social determinants of health such as economic stability, education, and food security.

Even when relevant research exists, its translation into practice is often hindered by policy briefs lacking practical implementation recommendations, resulting in generic policies difficult for policymakers to apply. Consequently, an inclusive approach incorporating innovative solutions from sectors like energy, agriculture, and biodiversity is essential, coupled with a transdisciplinary research focus on the multifaceted impacts of climate change on health outcomes.

To facilitate these approaches, participatory and localized data collection tools are necessary to capture contextual evidence for practical solutions, ensuring research directly informs policy and action while fostering stronger collaboration between climate and health researchers. Finally, strategic investments in specialized knowledge translation units or co-creation centres at national and regional levels can enhance the dissemination of technical publications.

Capacity Building Landscape

Consultations indicate that dedicated C&H capacity-building initiatives are nascent. Ongoing engagements, webinars, alliances, and platforms are already enhancing awareness among diverse stakeholders about climate and health linkages, current interventions, and funding opportunities. Several short-term training programs, including flagship fellowships at global, regional, and national levels, and project-based capacity support are emerging to address the pressing demand for C&H skills. However, these short courses often lack depth in imparting technical skills.

Moreover, the study reveals a predominant focus on research and policy within capacity-building efforts, neglecting critical areas such as leadership, investment skills for resilience, advocacy, monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment. A significant gap exists in developing the investment skills necessary to secure funding from international donors and climate financing platforms. Given that 85% of Africa's climate plans under NDCs depend on international financing, there is a critical need for skills to mobilize funding for projects to translate research and policy investments into practical outcomes. The Green Climate Fund's Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme is addressing this gap and can complement efforts to expand access to climate and health training, including broadening environmental health curricula in universities.

Funding Landscape

A significant challenge hindering transdisciplinary climate and health research and action is the availability of funding. While the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and other multilateral climate finance platforms are gaining momentum and commitment, Africa's readiness to access such financing is not well articulated. African countries have secured USD 3 billion from the GCF so far, with USD 1.5 billion supporting cross-cutting projects, and USD 7.2 billion targeted towards Africa as of June 2024.



In addition, the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in 2022 saw the establishment of a landmark Loss and Damage Fund and implementation mechanism. These financing options offer vital avenues to support the integration of health considerations into climate policies and actions.

However, the limited capacity and experience of African countries in accessing and implementing such funds pose significant barriers. This underlines the urgent need to enhance Africa's readiness to access and effectively utilize available climate financing, ensuring that these resources are directed towards initiatives that truly address the continent's climate and health challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study suggests the following policy recommendations for strengthening the integration of health considerations into climate change policies and actions in Africa:

- 1. Increase Investment in Climate-Related Health Actions:** Multilateral and bilateral donors, national governments, and private sector actors should allocate more resources to climate-related health actions. This includes supporting the development and implementation of National Health Resilience and National Adaptation Plans (NHRNAPs).
- 2. Strengthen Transdisciplinary Research and Collaboration:** Governments, research institutions, and civil society organizations should promote transdisciplinary research and collaboration to address the complex interplay between climate and health. This requires fostering partnerships across sectors, enhancing data collection and sharing, and supporting knowledge translation and implementation efforts.
- 3. Enhance Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing:** There is a need to expand and deepen capacity-building initiatives to equip stakeholders with the necessary skills to address climate and health challenges. This includes developing comprehensive training programs that cover leadership, investment, advocacy, and impact assessment skills.
- 4. Improve Access to Climate Financing:** African countries should enhance their readiness to access and utilize climate financing from multilateral and bilateral sources. This involves building capacity for project preparation and implementation, strengthening coordination mechanisms, and ensuring that financing is directed towards initiatives that effectively address the continent's climate and health challenges.
- 5. Foster Stakeholder Engagement and Advocacy:** Regional and national stakeholders should enhance their engagement in climate and health discussions and advocacy efforts. This includes leveraging existing networks and alliances, fostering partnerships, and increasing the visibility of African voices in global climate and health forums.



CONCLUSION

10

The integration of health considerations into climate change policies and actions in Africa is critical for building resilience and ensuring the well-being of populations. By increasing investment, promoting transdisciplinary research, enhancing capacity building, improving access to climate financing, and fostering stakeholder engagement, African countries can effectively address the complex challenges posed by climate change and health.

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