Adaptation policy, governance and politics in sub-Saharan Africa

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1. Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa has been dealt a particularly cruel hand with respect to climate change. It has played virtually no part in the making of the problem, and even now contributes less than 4% of greenhouse gas emissions associated with fossil fuel use. But at the same time many parts of the continent are likely to be hit particularly hard by climate trends and extremes. It is precisely recognition of these kinds of asymmetries that has led to the establishment of the Green Climate Fund, intended to help pay for adaptation to climate change in the world’s poorest countries, many of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.

There is now a large and increasing academic literature on adaptation and development (some of which is reviewed below), and many international aid agencies are wrestling with the issue of how to support adaptation to climate change in practice, in anticipation of the hoped for $100 billion a year that will flow through the Fund by 2020. However, what is striking about much research and donor practice is how little thinking there has been about the political context in sub-Saharan Africa, what this means for the quality of governance, and the capacity to plan and deliver what are often quite complex policies and programmes. This is all the more surprising given the quantity and depth of what is already known about politics and governance in Africa. This paper asks what can be learned from that body of knowledge and experience that is relevant for adaptation policy. It is very much a preliminary analysis and rather than presenting clear evidence for particular conclusion, it mainly points to a research agenda to be pursued.

The primary conclusion is that, by failing to acknowledge the constraints of the political and governance context, much thinking about adaptation policy in Africa is unrealistic, and much donor activity is likely to have little effect. Indeed, in some cases, a large increase in climate finance may have a perverse effect, sustaining political systems that undermine the capacity of states to build adaptive capacity. It is argued that a perspective on adaptation informed by political analysis helps not only to anticipate where particular problems are likely to be encountered, such as specific sectors or locations in a country, but also to point to more effective responses.

In this paper I focus on adaptation policy, but much of the analysis would also apply to mitigation, or low-carbon development policy. However, the latter would involve a much deeper consideration of the private sector in African countries and the complexities of the relationship between politicians, the state and the private sector.
In the next section I briefly set the context, explaining why climate change will be so important for sub-Saharan Africa. Section 3 then explores the nature of adaptation policy, and existing perspectives on why successful adaptation in low-income countries may be difficult to achieve. Here, I introduce the argument that adaptation policy can be characterised as the delivery of public goods, services and policies that shape incentives, and therefore questions of governance should be paramount in considering that policy.

In section 4 I then examine the problem of governance in sub-Saharan Africa, looking in turn at the record since the 1960s, arguments that root poor governance in patrimonial politics, and the role of aid. I also look specifically at the question of whether and how Africa may be changing. The analysis in sections 3 and 4 sets up the discussion of implications of African political systems for adaptation policy in section 5, and possible responses in section 6. Section 7 concludes.

2. Climate change in sub-Saharan Africa

Although there is considerable uncertainty about the detail, sub-Saharan Africa is likely to be particularly badly affected by climate change (Parry et al 2007, Ch 9). The region is expected to warm more than the global average and experience major changes in average rainfall, with drying in the sub-tropical regions and increased rainfall in the tropics. At the same time, many of Africa’s economies are heavily dependent on sectors that are highly exposed to climate change, especially rainfed agriculture which generates around 60% of employment and in some countries approaching 50% of GDP (Collier et al 2009). Evidence on the impacts of already existing climate change since the 1950s on economic growth suggests that poor countries (most of which are now concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa) have experienced a significant negative effect, with wide-ranging effects on agricultural and industrial output and investment (Dell et al 2008). A recent review of the literature on the poverty impacts of climate change concludes that Africa (along with South Asia) is expected to see “substantial increases in poverty relative to a baseline without climate change” (Skoufias et al 2011: 22).

Impacts (both current and expected future) will fall across a wide range of sectors and contexts (Parry et al 2007 Ch 9, Collier et al 2009). It is often argued that the direct impacts on agriculture, livestock management and eco-systems (with implications for rural economies and food security), on water and on health (with the spread of malaria and dengue in tropical regions being a particular concern) will be the most important for the livelihoods of the mass of the population. However, other impacts are also likely to have a crucial effect on long-term poverty reduction and economic growth. For example, recent integrated assessment model studies of Ethiopia, Ghana and Mozambique by the World Bank have pointed to the critical role played by road infrastructure in Africa and the potential disruptive impacts of heavy rainfall on roads.1 Energy supply could also potentially be unusually sensitive to climate change, because of sub-Saharan Africa’s current reliance on and massive potential for hydro-electric power (Eberhard et al 2011). Similarly important will be long-run impacts on tourism, industry and coastal zones (because most large African cities are coastal).

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1 http://climatechange.worldbank.org/content/country-case-studies-economics-adaptation-climate-change
Sub-Saharan Africa’s particular vulnerability to climate change lies not only in more anticipated severity of and exposure to adverse climatic trends and climate-related shocks. As the IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report notes:

“this vulnerability is exacerbated by existing developmental challenges such as endemic poverty, complex governance and institutional dimensions; limited access to capital, including markets, infrastructure and technology; ecosystem degradation; and complex disasters and conflicts. These in turn have contributed to Africa’s weak adaptive capacity, increasing the continent’s vulnerability to projected climate change.” (Parry et al 2007: 435)

Thus, while climate change is not a problem of Africa’s making, many African countries are likely to be hit particularly hard, and at the same time their capacity to adapt to climate change is weak (Collier et al 2009: 140). In principle, the responsibilities of wealthier industrialised countries are clear – to mitigate climate change by radically reducing emissions (Birdsall et al 2005) and to help African countries adapt to climate change that is already inevitable.

3. The nature of the adaptation challenge

3.1 Current approaches to adaptation policy

What is the nature of the adaptation challenge? The growing literature on and experience of adaptation to climate change in developing countries has identified several distinct but related dimensions. One is based on the important idea that households and communities have been adapting to climate-related risks for generations and to climate change for the last few decades – so-called “autonomous adaptation”. The community-based adaptation (CBA) approach attempts to build on and support autonomous adaptation at local level (Huq and Reid 2007). But more broadly, the role of adaptation policy at national and global levels can be seen as to support autonomous adaptation in the face of climatic changes that threaten to overwhelm local efforts (World Bank 2010a: 87).

A second issue is the distinction between specific actions needed to adapt to particular climatic changes (“adaptation”) and the capacity to plan and undertake those actions (“adaptive capacity”) (West and Gawith 2005, Adger et al 2003, Yohe and Moss 2000). An increasingly common view in the international development context is that building adaptive capacity should be the primary aim of policy. An alternative formulation is that policy should seek to build “resilience” to climate shocks and trends, and there is ongoing debate on the appropriateness of these terms (Leach 2008, Bahadur et al 2010). Closely related to these approaches is the idea that, although climate change introduces new complexities and uncertainties (Mitchell and Maxwell 2010), the best kind of adaptation policy is largely “good development” or, for some, economic growth (e.g. World Bank 2010b, Bowen et al 2011). As the 2007 Human Development Report puts it:

“Human development itself is the most secure foundation for adaptation to climate change. Policies that promote equitable growth and the diversification of livelihoods, expand opportunities in health and education, provide social

\[http://community.eldis.org/cbax/\]

\[These views are fairly widespread in the UK’s international development ministry (DFID), for example\]
insurance for vulnerable populations, improve disaster management and support post-emergency recovery all enhance the resilience of poor people facing climate risks. That is why climate change adaptation planning should be seen not as a new branch of public policy but as an integral part of wider strategies for poverty reduction and human development.” (UNDP 2007: 172)

As this suggests, a third interpretation of adaptation policy is that it should aim at “mainstreaming” or “integration”, i.e.: “to facilitate the successful integration and implementation of mitigation and adaptation in sectoral and development policies.” (Klein et al 2005: 584. See also Lemos et al 2007).

These approaches to what adaptation policy should aim at have largely defined objectives in relationship to climate shocks and trends, or in relationship to sectoral or wider development policies. However, from a public policy viewpoint, at a deeper level, it is also possible (and I believe useful) to think of adaptation policy as simply as providing public goods and services, both directly by government, and via setting incentives (see Table 1 for some examples). What is involved in practice, whether it is providing accurate and relevant information about changing future weather patterns, developing scenarios about a range of possible future climatic effects and applying these in planning or policy, a different approach to agricultural extension, or restructuring economic growth away from sectors vulnerable to climate change, is of this nature. A question of critical importance for adaptation policy in a developing country context is therefore one that applies to public policy more widely: what are the barriers that prevent the formulation and implementation of policies providing public goods and services, and how might these barriers be overcome?

3.2 Why might adaptation to climate change in Africa be difficult?

Much of the existing literature and donor practice on adaptation policy in developing countries tends to answer this question in terms of a lack of technical capacity (see also Tanner and Allouche 2011: 2). A fairly common approach is think about adaptation policy in terms of lists of analytical, planning and delivery processes (e.g. West and Gawith 2005, Agrawal and van Aalst 2008, UNDP 2007: 173, Mitchell and Maxwell 2010). This administrative view is well summed up in a recent formulation from the UK-based Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN):

“There could be a four-stage process to secure climate-resilient development. First, policy makers would assess climate risks and uncertainties. Second, they would develop and evaluate measures to address those risks and uncertainties. Third, they would prioritise the most effective measures and, finally, integrate them into development strategies” (Mitchell and Maxwell 2010: 4)
Table 1
Adaptation measures as public goods, services and policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of measure</th>
<th>Public or quasi-public good</th>
<th>Public service</th>
<th>Public policy setting incentives</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing climate science units to provide better and more relevant modelling</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing climate screening tools for use at project level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disaster risk management plans and emergency relief specifically focused on extreme weather events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social protection schemes incorporating elements to strengthen adaptive capacity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adapting agricultural extension services to provide support for more drought-resistant crop varieties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Price regulations of crops and use of various agricultural technologies to foster diversification and limit farmers' risks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support to better water storage</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vector control programmes focused on new areas at risk of e.g. malaria, dengue</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Revising regulations and standards (e.g. building codes) to reflect climate change risks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing roads able to withstand more intense rainfall</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased coastal protection</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting forest protection and afforestation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies to incentivise and support manufacturing and services to diversify the economy</td>
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</table>

Defining the adaptation policy process primarily in a linear and rational way as a set of essentially bureaucratic tasks leads to the view that the most serious barrier to successful adaptation is a lack of technical and managerial capacity, and thence to the need for technical assistance, including guides and “toolkits” for adaptation planning (which is indeed the approach taken by CDKN and also the Danish funded UNEP/UNDP DARE programme⁴). An increasing number of such frameworks have appeared in the last 2-3 years (e.g. UNEP/UNDP 2011, Chaum et al 2011. For a review of toolkits see IDS and Ecofys 2011).

Such technical assistance and guides will almost certainly be needed in many African countries, because technical capacity is often weak, climate change is a new challenge and its effects are highly complex, especially on natural systems (e.g. Eriksen et al 2011, Yohe and Tol 2002). For example, just in agriculture, the policy challenge may include: understanding the complexities and uncertainties of climate projections at national or

⁴ [http://www.ccdare.org](http://www.ccdare.org)
lower levels; relating these to changing seasonality (Devereux et al 2012) and impacts on farming systems; supporting farmers in switching crops, or varieties of crops, in changing tillage practices and in adopting agro-forestry; providing weather-indexed crop insurance, and changing food distribution, all in ways which are pro-poor and gender-aware (e.g. Fritschel 2007).

However, it is not clear that, at present, a lack of technical capacity in most African countries is the most binding constraint on adaptation policy, especially given the range of donor-funded technical assistance on offer. For technical assistance to be effective, governments really have to be interested in adopting and applying it to public policy. For guides and toolkits to be useful, there has to be demand for them from a policy actor sufficiently senior and sufficiently committed to the public good. There is some evidence to suggest that, with a few exceptions, this demand is not present.

For some years, external actors have recognised that unless developing country governments “own” a policy agenda, it is hard for donors to make much progress on that agenda. The OECD’s Development Assistance Committee developed a set of principles to guide aid practice in conferences in Paris and Accra in the 2000s, and country ownership is one of the most important, both on normative and practical grounds. The OECD has subsequently recognised that this principle should also apply to adaptation policy, i.e. that this policy should be consistent with country governments’ own strategies and visions for development (OECD 2009). Likewise, the recent evaluation of the Global Environmental Facility’s Least developed Countries Fund notes the importance of high level political interest in adaptation (DANIDA/GEF 2009). But a recent review of climate finance relationships in 6 African countries show low levels of country ownership (OECD 2011), as do separate analyses on Tanzania and Kenya (Agulhas 2010, 2011). Programmes offering technical assistance for adaptation strategies and projects are finding demand in most sub-Saharan African countries weak and poorly expressed.

Some thinking on adaptation and adaptation policy in developing countries, and increasingly, some evaluations, do point to the importance of non-technical processes. This is sometimes expressed in terms of the importance of “institutions”, as the quote from the IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report above indicates (see also Halsnæs and Verhagen 2007, Chaum et al 2011, DANIDA/GEF 2009, Osman and Downing 2007). Brooks et al (2005) argue that adaptive capacity is associated with strong governance, and civil and political rights. Yohe and Moss (2000) argue that adaptive capacity is determined, inter alia, not only by the capacity of decision makers to manage information, but also the credibility of the policy process and of policy makers themselves.

However, while the role of institutions in building adaptive capacity is increasingly recognised, there appears to be relatively little research on exactly what the institutional problems are and what underlies them. Evaluations of adaptation strategy processes point to problems arising from the institutional architecture of government, especially ministerial silos (e.g. DANIDA/GEF 2009, Osman and Downing 2007) but do not explore the dynamics of governance and institutions in any depth.

There have also been some calls for adaptation policy to engage with the underlying causes of vulnerability of poor people, and indeed with the roots of poverty and inequality (e.g. Schipper 2007, Mitchell and Tanner 2008). Attempts have been made to bring a number of different frameworks for understanding those roots to bear on
adaptation and adaptation policy, including the livelihoods framework (Sabates-Wheeler et al 2008), a rights-based approach (Polack 2008), gender analysis (Demetriades and Esplen 2008) and the assets framework Prowse and Scott 2008).

These contributions are important, not least because they begin to connect debates about adaptation and adaptation policy with existing bodies of knowledge and analysis about the development process. In the words of Sabates-Wheeler et al (2008), there is both a need and an opportunity to “avoid repetition” in the climate policy sphere. However, to date, there has been no attempt in any depth to contextualise debates about adaptation policy in what has been learned about governance and politics in sub-Saharan Africa (and indeed other parts of the developing world) over the last 30 years. Dianna Cammack’s (2007a) opinion piece points the way, but is very brief. The 2011 IDS Bulletin special issue on the political economy of climate is also a landmark in introducing thinking about political economy to international and national climate policy, but does not fully engage with the literature on governance and politics in Africa. It is to this body of knowledge that I now turn.

4. Governance and politics in sub-Saharan Africa

Over the last two decades, from a range of different perspectives, governance, institutions and politics have come to be seen as a core part of development. There is now a very large body of research and analysis on governance, institutions and politics in development. Here, it is possible only to draw out some of the key insights from this literature.

A preliminary general point is that there is a considerable evidence for the view that, in Rodrik et al (2004)’s words, “institutions rule”, that is, the quality and nature of economic, political and social institutions is a crucial determinant of development outcomes, especially economic growth and poverty reduction. This evidence comes both in the form of cross-country econometric analyses of economic growth (Acemoglu and Robinson 2008, Rodrik 2007 Ch 2, Doucouliagos and Paldam 2009) and in case studies. At the same time, the literature on institutions increasingly shows that while there are certain essential underlying functions of institutions in supporting economic growth and delivering services, the forms that successful institutions can take vary widely, and evolve through different stages of development (e.g. Rodrik 2003, 2007 Ch6, Chang 2002, Centre for the Future State 2010). Contra the extended version of the Washington Consensus, there is no single set of institutions (including pluralist democratic political institutions or liberalised markets) that produces “good governance” and strong economies. The types of institution and governance effective at different stages of development may be very different. In particular, it is not useful to assume that the institutions and types of governance seen in high-income and middle-income countries can and should be transplanted into low income countries.

4.1 Africa’s governance record

For at least four decades, many sub-Saharan African countries suffered from very poor governance across a range of different dimensions, and institutions that were not functional for growth or even the delivery of basic public goods and services. Throughout

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the period from 1960 to the end of the last century, large-scale conflicts, some externally 
fuelled in the Cold War phase, and often involving state collapse and warlordism, were 
fairly widespread (Bates 2008).

Other countries did not experience conflict, but suffered other aspects of poor 
governance. Economic management was particularly important, as it underpinned 
poverty reduction and resources for public services. Again, up until the 2000s, Africa’s 
economic growth and poverty reduction record was very weak (Collier and Gunning 
1999), especially in comparison with countries in Asia which were comparably poor in 
the 1960s (Lockwood 2006: 275-77, van Donge et al 2010). Average real GDP per head 
in SSA in 2000 was roughly the same as it was in 1975, at $950 in 1995 prices (Herbst 
and Mills 2003). Oil exporting countries, despite greater income from natural resources, 
did worse than the average.

African governments clearly faced major challenges at independence, with economies 
highly dependent on commodity production and exports, poor infrastructure and very low 
levels of human capital. However, in most cases they evidently failed to mobilise 
investment, lead diversification into new sectors and maintain macro-economic stability 
(Sandbrook 1985: 42). With one or two exceptions, farmers were effectively heavily 
taxed through price controls and overvalued exchange rates, extension services were 
poor and state marketing boards were frequently loss-making, drawing off scarce public 
resources from other possible uses (Rodrik 1998, Bates 1981). At the same time, the 
results of state intervention in industry were described by Lall (2000: 31-32) as 
“abysmal”.6

Corruption also became endemic in most countries over the period, ranging from the top, 
with well known cases of leaders such as Mobutu, Bokassa and Abacha enriching 
themselves with public resources, down to demands for bribes in return for access to 
everyday state functions and services, including schools, clinics, police and local courts. 
Bayart et al (1999) went so far as to characterise African states as “criminalised”. 
Corruption was linked to an erosion of state capacity from what was already a very low 
baseline at independence (Lienert and Modi 1997). Van de Walle (2001: 130) 
characterised civil services as suffering from “pervasive absenteeism, endemic 
corruption, politicization, declining legitimacy and low morale”. There was large scale 
brain drain of middle and senior state managers, and (partly due to high levels of 
inflation), civil service salaries had lost most of their value by the 1980s.

Public services, including education and health, but also other areas such as agricultural 
extension and provision of water and sanitation, suffered accordingly. By the 1980s, 
school enrolments stagnated, and progress in reducing infant and child mortality slowed 
(Cornia and Mwabu 1997). By the late 1990s, more than half of sub-Saharan Africa’s 
countries were off-track to meet the Millennium Development Goals (Carceles et al 
2001). The AIDS epidemic was reversing life expectancy in many countries. The state of 
public services and health and education outcomes partly reflected economic collapse 
and conflict, but it was also affected by the deterioration of governance, capacity and by

6 This experience of failed management of the economy should not be read as a general critique, 
since the record on East and South East Asia shows that active intervention to overcome 
coordination and information problems in developing economies can be extremely successful 
(Stiglitz 1996) and indeed necessary (Chang 2002, Rodrik 2007 Ch 4). But it should be read as 
evidence that interventions by African governments did not achieve these aims.
rent-seeking. A series of public expenditure tracking surveys in the 1990s revealed how much money was going missing between legislatures approving expenditure centrally and its arrival at the point of delivery. In a particularly well-known case, almost 90% of funds voted for primary schools in Uganda in the early 1990s were being diverted (Hubbard 2007).

4.2 The political roots of poor governance and consequences for the state

A key insight from the literature on sub-Saharan Africa is that the roots of this history of poor governance – characterised by Kelsall and Booth (2010: 3) as “authoritarian, personalistic, opaque and corrupt” – lie in the nature of politics and the state (Bates 1981, Sandbrook 1985, Hyden 1983, Diamond 1987, Bayart 1993, Chabal and Daloz 1999, van de Walle 2001). Much of the nature of African politics was formed in the relatively short period of independence from colonial rule, when nationalist leaders had to throw together coalitions extremely rapidly (Allen 1995). Inevitably, such alliances relied heavily on the existing class of tribal leaders and chiefs which had been created under indirect colonial rule. As a result, in almost all cases, the mode of governance in newly independent African countries carried over many characteristics of politics under colonial rule. These included the status of the people as subjects of authority rather than citizens with rights of free association and political representation, the use of a mix of patronage and repression to maintain order, and an accentuation of ethnic identity (Mamdani 1996).

The result in most sub-Saharan African countries is what has become known variously as clientelism, neo-patrimonialism or prebendalism: a political system based on exchanges between political patrons, dispensing “privileged access to state resources, rationed by state leaders following a strict political logic” (van de Walle 2001: 50) and clients offering political support and allegiance in exchange (Allen 1995: 304-5, see also Cammack 2007b, Clapham 1982.). In many African countries, patrimonialism has been strongly shaped by ethnic identity (Chabal and Daloz 1999, Boone 2003). State resources were thus used not only for personal self-enrichment (although this certainly went on) but for political purposes. In Claude Ake’s words (1996: 116), “The struggle for power was so absorbing that everything else, including development, was marginalized.” Patrimonial politics had a number of consequences:

- A strong “winner-takes-all” dynamic: “to have power was to have the means to reproduce it; to lose power, however, was to risk never having the means to regain it” (Allen 1995: 304). The stakes were particularly high where countries had natural resources such as oil, diamonds and gold and for many years the willingness of multi-national companies to pay natural resource rents supported regime leaders in power. But in cases where no one faction established strong central control, political competition became increasingly violent and the system increasingly unstable as it moved towards “spoils politics” with extreme levels of looting of state resources. Some, as noted above, descended into warlordism and civil war. In other cases, such as Tanzania, Zambia, Senegal and Malawi, where leaders were able to bureaucratise and centralise power more effectively, clientelism has been more stable, and indeed remarkably resilient and adaptable in the face of both external shocks and pressures (Allen 1996).

- A ballooning of state expenditure and state offices, including large Parliaments and Cabinets (van de Walle 2001). In line with existing arrangements in many
cases, most African governments controlled or took over control of large parts of the economy, including agricultural input and marketing boards. While expansion of state capacity was urgently needed in areas like infrastructure, health and education, appointments and spending were made on a political basis, not a meritocratic one. As noted above, economic management was also distorted, and the result was that African economies remained dependent (as they still largely do today) on a narrow range of low value commodities for export earnings (Arbache and Page 2012). For a while, countries were protected from the consequences of economic decline by the commodity price boom in the 1970s. However, when prices dropped sharply in the early 1980s, many countries faced simultaneous debt, inflation and balance of payment crises (Ndulu and O'Connell 1999: 44-45). The real value of salaries plunged (Lienert and Modi – by 90% between 1964 and 1984 in Tanzania, for example – and shortages of goods and foreign exchange began to appear. In these circumstances, the value of a government post no longer lay in the wage, but in the ability to seek rents i.e. extract bribes, and petty corruption became endemic. Starved of resources, and distorted by corruption, the provision of public goods and services virtually collapsed in many places. With extensive state intervention in the economy in most cases, pervasive rent-seeking for personal and political gain further undermined economic performance.

- Hybrid states. African legislatures and executives took on all the formal features of modern state, but these coexist with informal personalised relationships and patronage – what anthropologist Emmanuel Terray called the “politics of the veranda” (Kelsall 2002). Informal relationships in bureaucracy are again fairly widespread, but in many African contexts their importance is much greater, and sanctions against rent-seeking and patronage are weak. Chabal and Daloz (1999: 95) maintain that the state in sub-Saharan Africa is “nothing other than a relatively empty shell”, while van de Walle (2001: 128) argues that formal and informal institutions “coexist, overlap and struggle for control of the state in most countries”.

Overall, patrimonial politics in sub-Saharan Africa produced states that could be characterised as “non-developmental” (Leftwich 2000) or “anti-developmental” (Lockwood 2006), in explicit distinction from the “developmental” states of East Asia (White and Wade 1984, Johnson 1999). These latter states were not democratic or transparent in governance, but they delivered high levels of inclusive economic growth, extraordinary diversification of exports and industrial structure, rapid poverty reduction, and massive investments in education and health, all in marked contrast to Africa’s lack of developmental progress until very recently.

This general description of African politics and the consequent nature of the state in Africa need to be qualified in certain ways. As explored extensively in the Africa Politics and Power Programme led by David Booth at the Overseas Development Institute, there have been variations in developmental performance under patrimonialism. Some countries, including Ivory Coast under Houphouët-Boigny (1960-75), Malawi under Banda (1964-1978), Kenya under Kenyatta (1965-75) and more recently Rwanda under Kagame (2000-2012) have had greater stability and much better economic performance than the African average (Kelsall and Booth 2010, Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2011). Booth and colleagues base their explanation for why these regimes were more developmental on two factors. First, as Allen (1995) argued, their leaders were able to
centralise control over rent-seeking and political patronage. Secondly, their leaders took a longer-term more disciplined perspective on rent-seeking, with elements of investment, rather than a short-term view focused purely on consumption (Kelsall and Booth 2010: 6-11. See also Gray and Khan (2010) for the case of Tanzania).

The concept of developmental patrimonialism is also informed by analyses of South East Asia. This region had many economic similarities with sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s, with similar, or even lower, income levels and similar economic structure, including large natural resource endowments. Nevertheless, many countries in South East Asia, such as Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia have followed East Asia towards rapid economic growth and poverty reduction and large investments in physical and human infrastructure, leaving African comparators far behind (van Donge et al 2010). This contrast did not mean, however, that the developmental states in South East Asia were free from rent-seeking and patrimonialism; indeed, these were widespread. Khan and Jomo (2000) explain this apparent paradox partly along the same lines as Booth and colleagues. They focus on the degree of centralisation of rent seeking (building on Shleifer and Vishny 1993), on the type of rents mobilised, and on the use of rent. The contrast between the more successful countries (e.g. Malaysia) and the less successful (e.g. Philippines) is then between regimes that centrally controlled rent-seeking, mobilised more than monopoly rents created by state institutions, and used rents for long term investments rather than consumption.

In marked contrast with South East Asia, however, developmental patrimonial regimes in sub-Saharan Africa have not been sustained beyond the death of the regime head. Economic and social change was not sufficient to achieve any kind of sustained take off and escape from a return to anti-developmental patrimonial politics. In some cases, such as with Museveni in Uganda, this reversal has even happened under a single leader.

4.3. The international context, the role of aid and governance reforms

External actors and the external context have played a major role in allowing the persistence of anti-developmental regimes in sub-Saharan Africa (Moore 2009, Centre for the Future State 2010: 18-20). The role of multinational companies in realising rent from oil and minerals was noted above. A combination of secrecy and an increasingly liberal regulatory regime in international finance has meant it has been easy for elites to manage their rents more safely, and has facilitated major capital flight (Collier et al 1999).

The role of aid has been slightly different and rather more complex. Economic crisis saw the large scale entry of international donors into Africa from the 1980s. One effect was that aid soon became an important source of rent for elites to seek control, especially in non-oil exporters. Many countries became very aid dependent, with the majority of the budget coming from external finance. Another effect was that in certain ways (typically inadvertently), donors (and NGOs) also contributed to the undermining of state capacity, for example by exacerbating brain drain through paying much higher salaries than governments could, and by ending up attempting to micro-manage policy processes.

Almost immediately, donors attempted to instigate economic reform. An initial and mostly successful round of reforms were aimed at restoring macro-economic stability through monetary policy and exchange rate liberalisation. A further round, far less implemented in practice, were a set of liberalising reforms aimed at reducing
government intervention in the economy and cutting back fiscal deficits (Killick 1995, 2004, OED 1997). Since these reforms threatened the system on which political patronage was based, regimes resisted, undermined or distorted reform (van de Walle 2001), often playing a cat-and-mouse game, in which aid was repeatedly suspended and then re-instated, (often partly because of institutional incentives to disburse within donor organisations – see e.g. Kanbur 2000). Overall, where there was a contest between domestic political imperatives and donors, domestic politics won out (Deverajan et al 2001), and see Hutchful (1995) for the case of Ghana.

The 1990s saw a new set of developments in the relationship between African regimes and donors. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 led to a major shift away from one-party systems to multi-party politics. These changes have had mixed effects. In some countries (for example Tanzania), the incumbent party has simply maintained complete dominance over politics, so that there has been little change in practice (Chabal and Daloz 1999). In other cases (for example Malawi), political competition has been opened up, with some positive consequences for the economy and public services. In yet other countries (for example Ivory Coast recently), political competition has actually increased instability and political violence.

At the same time, donors were beginning to realise how important the poor quality of institutions in Africa was, and started a new round of reforms aimed at improving governance, including attempts to restructure the civil service and reduce corruption in many countries. There were also programmes targeted at specific sectors, especially health (Andersen 2000) where donors spent much of the 1990s and early 2000s trying to introduce user fees. Governance reform programmes mostly aimed to undertake changes to incentives or institutions, including salary structures, transparency of information (including computerisation of customs and revenue), fiscal decentralisation, and new agencies (for example anti-corruption commissions).

However, as with economic adjustment reforms, the results of governance reforms have fallen short of donors’ expectations. Repeated assessments of reform programmes have shown limited effects (Berg 2000, Poldiano 2001, OED 2004, Evans 2008). A recent review for the OECD concludes that: “there is a consensus across the literature and in the findings of most major evaluations and reviews of PSGR [public sector governance reform] activity that PSGRs have tended to be unsuccessful” (Scott 2011: 8). Again, as with the history of economic reforms, the limited success of the governance agenda points to the fact that, in the words of Booth (2011: s8) “Institutional change is a function of politics.” Crucially, governance reforms focused on formal institutions, rather than the informal relationships at the heart of patrimonial politics. As van de Walle (2001: 127) pointed out:

“most anti-corruption strategies being devised in the policy community simply assume that there is a rational-legal logic at the apex of these states that will be available to carry out the strategy; in fact, all too often, leaders at the apex of the state choose to undermine these strategies, which threaten practices they find useful and profitable”.

In other words, the governance reform approach tended to frame the issue as a principal-agent problem when it fact it was a collective action problem (Persson et al 2010).
Overall, the record on aid in Africa has been mixed. Resource flows to particular sectors, especially health and education, have helped deliver improvements in outcomes, but there is no evidence that overall, aid led to improvements in economic growth (Doucouliagos and Paldam 2009), and least of all, institutional change (Booth 2011a).

4.4 Has Africa changed?

Since the late 1990s, despite the history described above, aspects of Africa’s generally weak development performance have begun to change. Since a peak in the late 1990s, there has been a sharp decline in the number of countries with armed conflict. There has also been a surge in economic growth. Radelet (2010) heralds the emergence of 16 African countries that he argues have experienced dramatic changes since the mid-1990s, including Ethiopia, most countries in East and Southern Africa (excluding Zimbabwe) and a group of West African countries (Mail, Burkina Faso and Ghana). These countries have seen an average growth in incomes per head of 3.2 per year between 1996 and 2008, as well as rising school enrolments and better health indicators. Sala-i-Martin and Pinkovskiy (2010) argue that poverty rates estimated from GDP data have fallen sharply, from almost 45% of people living on under a $1/day in the 1980s to around 32% in the mid-2000s. Rising trade and tax income has also lessened aid dependence.

Has there been a fundamental change in the dynamics of politics, governance and developmental performance? Deeper analysis of the headline economic growth trends gives a mixed picture. Most African countries are still highly commodity dependent (Arbache and Page 2012: 18), and increased growth over the last decade has partly been the result of a boom in commodity prices. So far, growth has not brought any structural transformation in African economies. On average, manufacturing as a proportion of GDP in African low-income countries is still lower now than in 1985 (Page 2012). Macro-economic management has improved, but especially outside of oil and mineral-exporters, the growth acceleration has not been accompanied by an increase in investment. Arbache and Page (2010) express some concern that growth will be vulnerable to reversals in commodity price rises and that conditions for sustained “take off” are not yet in place. At the same time, estimates of poverty reduction based on more accurate household consumption survey data suggest that the GDP-based estimates are overoptimistic and that there is no systematic improvement in inequality (Mackay 2011).

The overall story on governance is equally hard to interpret. The main improvement in the World Bank’s CPIA measure between 1997 and 2006 was in macro-economic management, with only slow change in measures of transparency, accountability, corruption, quality of public administration, property rights and rule-based government. The World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators (Kaufmann et al 2009) for Africa actually worsened between 1996 and 2005, particularly for oil and natural resource rich countries (Arbache and Page 2010: 16-17. See also Kaufmann 2012). In 2011, 14 out of the top 20 countries on the Foreign Policy/Fund for Peace failed states index were in

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7 Radelet’s view is that there are another group of ‘threshold’ countries, including Kenya and Senegal, that could soon join the “emerging Africa” category, leaving behind a smaller number of central African countries. He separates out the oil exporters, amongst whom recent economic growth experience is quite diverse.
sub-Saharan Africa, and most countries in the continent are still categorised as in critical condition or in danger of state failure.8

However, trends in conventional governance indicators may not be a particularly useful guide to prospects for development, since they emphasise form rather than function. As discussed above, it is less realistic to expect that African countries will take on the institutional characteristics of developed countries, and more realistic to hope that they may start to organise rent-seeking more effectively for developmental purposes.

However, while there are some signs of this in regimes with strong, centralised power, such as Ethiopia and Rwanda, it is far from clear it is happening elsewhere. In Ghana, for example, seen as one of Africa’s strongest performers (and one of Radelet’s emerging African “lions”), economically and institutionally, clientelism remains competitive and short-term in nature, producing growth without economic transformation (Whitfield 2011).

On the other hand, Bates and Block (2011) argue that in those countries where the democratisation reforms of the early 1990s did actually lead to real political competition, there has been a payoff to rural voters the form of an end to urban bias, as politicians have reduced effective tax rates and improved extension services. Subsidies for fertilizers in Malawi brought in over the last decade basically as a form of competition in a multi-party setting would be a classic example of this effect. Although average levels of public investment in agriculture remain low relative to other developing regions, at an average of 6% of total government expenditure in 2005 (NEPAD 2010), countries with higher levels of political competition have seen a sharp increase in productivity and incomes in agriculture.

Finally, there has also been substantial progress since 1990 in increasing educational enrolment and reducing child mortality rates (Melamed and Sumner 2011). The education and health sectors have been especially targeted by donors, partly because of the Millennium Development Goals, and these results probably partly reflect the increase in aid to sub-Saharan Africa from $12 billion in 2000 to $42 billion in 2009. There is also some evidence that aid effectiveness in the health sector in particular may be higher than average, and corruption lower, because regimes recognise that it is the sector donors care most about, and one where opportunities for rent-seeking are lower (Dietrich 2011).

There is no doubt that Africa has seen a major decline in conflict and that many African countries have seen rapid economic growth over the last decade, with some concomitant falls in poverty. Health services and outcomes have improved particularly, and in some countries agriculture has revived. However, there are three major qualifications to this picture.

First, it is uneven. The total picture may be better than in the “lost decade” of the 1980s, but as Kaufmann (2012) emphasises, there is a high degree of variation within Africa in economic performance, political stability and the developmental effectiveness of institutions. The big resource-rich countries such as Nigeria and DRC in particular are still largely anti-developmental.

Second, it is fragile. While it is not solely due to the commodity price boom, this boom has nevertheless played a major role in the surge in economic growth. It is not yet clear that growth can be sustained, which requires a different set of policies and institutions than initiating growth (Rodrik 2007 Ch ?). Likewise, it is not clear whether the gains in health outcomes could currently be sustained if external donors were to disengage.

Third, and related to both previous points, it is not clear that the improvements in growth, poverty reduction and health outcomes really are the outcome of new, more developmentally minded regimes in Africa. The deeply anti-developmental and collapsed states of the past have been largely absent over the last ten years, but there are few examples of the kinds of developmental regimes of East and South East Asia that combined central control or coordination with a long term view on building economic and social outcomes.

5. Some implications for adaptation policy

The political context of most African countries and consequences for the motivation and capacity of states to deliver public goods and services has major implications for the agenda of building adaptive capacity and undertaking specific adaptation investments. If we take politics and its governance implications seriously, what might the issues for adaptation policy be?

A preliminary point is that there is not, as yet, much experience of adaptation policy on the ground in Africa. There is also, as yet, relatively little money. The much discussed Green Climate Fund, with anticipated revenue of around $100 billion a year, will not start until 2020 (and it is still not clear where the revenue will come from). There is currently some donor funding pledged under the “Fast Start” mechanism, but not very much has actually been disbursed, and much of what has is aimed at funding low-carbon energy projects. There is certainly no body of evidence (e.g. through evaluations) on the delivery of programmes, as opposed to the formulation of adaptation strategies (for example in the form of National Adaptation Plans of Action for the UNFCCC and the Least Developed Countries Fund of the Global Environmental Facility). Much of what follows may therefore be regarded as a set of expectations or hypotheses that could be tested as more evidence is gathered.

- **The value of technical assistance for adaptation is conditional on political context.** Treating adaptation and building adaptive capacity as primarily technical problems in sub-Saharan Africa is clearly problematic, given what we know about politics and the nature of governance. There is an increasing amount of expert knowledge and capacity building resource available in the relevant areas, from climate modelling to infrastructure planning, but if the real constraints to capacity and delivery are driven by the political context, technical assistance is likely to have little real effect. Such factors are also likely make the “demand” for technical assistance weak and incoherent. In the hybrid states of many African countries, technical advice tends to work through formal institutions, does not engage with informal institutions and relationships and will be undermined by them (see also Cammack 2007a).

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9 See [www.climatefundsupdate.org](http://www.climatefundsupdate.org) for details
‘Ownership’ is a problematic and complex issue. As noted above, one early piece of evidence about climate policy making is that levels of “ownership” by most country governments are low, with donors pushing the issue in many cases. As Booth (2011c) notes, problems with ownership, which is at the heart of the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness, arise from the fact that the Paris agenda assumes the existence of developmental regimes whereas in many cases they are absent. At the same time, increasing amounts of climate finance may encourage what looks like ownership, but is in fact rent-seeking (see below). Where adaptation problems are visible and pressing, there may be steps that external actors can take to help build institutions to tackle collective action problems (see below section 5), but these are likely to involve considerable attention to understanding local context better.

A critical issue in most countries will be agriculture and the rural economy. On the one hand, agriculture is particularly vulnerable to climate change, particularly Africa’s rain-fed agriculture. It is also central, in most countries, to the livelihoods of a majority of people, and to national economies. It is therefore at the heart of the adaptation policy challenge. On the other hand, African anti-developmental regimes have historically taxed agriculture heavily and underinvested in the rural economy. This is especially the case in relation to South East Asia. Van Donge et al (2010) identify a set of three conditions that were central to sustained and broad based growth in South East Asia: macro-economic stability, a market-based system that allows smallholder farmers economic freedom, and heavy pro-poor spending on agriculture and rural infrastructure. The last of these is the most important distinction between the two regions. In South East Asia, spending on agriculture and the rural economy (i.e. research, extension, input credit, irrigation, drainage, roads and land settlement) was between 10% and 20% of the development budget, and in some cases up to 30%. Even with the recent switch towards supporting agriculture in some countries, spending in almost all African countries is nowhere near this level. High levels of investment in rural areas (and in some cases land reform) in South East Asia was primarily political in origin, based mainly on fear of communist revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, whereas in Africa the threat to regimes has tended to come from cities rather than the countryside. The overall point here is that if successful adaptation policy needs investment in agriculture and the rural economy, a political dynamic that leads to underinvestment in agriculture is a fundamental block to successful adaptation, again not for any technical reason but because the basic development process required is absent.

Developmental states will be necessary for long term adaptation. As noted above, successful economic development, and especially diversification of the economy away from agricultural production, is a central part of building long-term adaptive capacity. Managing the diversification of the economy – which like successful adaptation is a long term transformation - is one of the defining characteristics of the types of developmental state seen in East and South East Asia. However, most African states have precisely failed to do this so far, and unless they take on a more developmental nature, they will therefore not be able to deliver either goal. A related issue is the reduction of poverty and the building of human capital through health and education, which again are a key part of building adaptive capacity across the mass of the population. Although these were not necessary primary goals for developmental regimes in East and South
East Asia, they have often been delivered, often for political reasons. By contrast, anti-developmental regimes in Africa have maintained scarcity and limited access to public services as a political strategy (Bayart 1993, van de Walle 2001). The result has been persistent high levels of poverty and high levels of inequality.

- **Adaptation will be more difficult to deliver in some sectors (e.g. infrastructure) than in others (e.g. health).** Where unproductive rent-seeking is an important part of the political dynamic, policy is likely to be most distorted in areas where the largest rents are to be found most easily, and with the fewest consequences for the sources of rent. If Dietrich (2011) is correct, the health sector, for example, offers fewer opportunities for rent seeking and at the same time, since donors give high priority to health, corrupt elites will strategically comply with attempts to reduce corruption and increase efficiency in the health sector, so as to maintain larger flows of aid. By contrast, adaptation investments in infrastructure, involving large capital expenditures and the construction industry, “long considered among the most corrupt industrial sectors” according to Lewis (2011: 255), are likely to be made substantially costlier, less efficient and possibly ineffective.

- **Adaptation will be more difficult in some geographical areas (e.g. arid area) and amongst some communities (pastoralists) than others.** As noted above, patrimonial politics often has an ethnic expression. Ethnic communities can be politically relevant, either because they form the basis for patrimonial networks for the ruling elite, or because they constitute threats that the elite takes seriously. (Scarritt and Mozaffer 1999). However, other, often smaller groups in peripheral and environmentally marginal areas are effectively politically irrelevant. As Raleigh (2010: 74) notes ‘This variation produces a ‘topography of government power’. Such a topography underscores public good distribution nationally and locally’ (see also Habyarimana et al 2007). Politically marginal areas receive fewer government services and goods, and suffer more from rent-seeking by officials (including the diversion of food aid). Frequently, such areas will also be more vulnerable to climate trends and shocks, and include arid lands. Pastoralist groups are also more likely to be politically irrelevant. Despite the greater need for support to adaptive capacity, anti-developmental patrimonial rule implies that populations in such areas will be less likely to receive it.

- **Climate finance poses a dilemma.** In climate policy circles, it is often taken for granted that climate finance for adaptation purposes should be available to poor countries on an unconditional basis, because of the historical responsibility of industrialised countries in causing the climate change problem. It is now proposed that the Green Climate Fund should be governed through the UNFCCC, rather than a donor institution like the World Bank, precisely because of this principle. The target that has been set for the Green Climate Fund is $100 billion a year by 2020, which is about 80% of current official aid from OECD countries. The adaptation element (about 30%, or $30 billion a year), should be proportionately more directed to regions and countries with more severe adaptation challenges. This might mean that sub-Saharan African countries receive something of the order of $20 billion a year more than would otherwise be the case. From a perspective based on a political analysis, this is a significant increase in international rent, of a form more akin to oil than aid (Collier 2006). In developmental regimes, while some of these resources may be diverted, much of
it is likely to be used effectively, and this would buttress the legitimacy of such regimes. However, for anti-developmental regimes, a big increase in international potentially works the other way, providing a perverse incentive (Moore 2009), providing more resources for political patronage and regime survival. It is unlikely to mean that poor people benefit through effective adaptation policies and measures. This is one reason why donors have so far tried to retain control over adaptation funding so far, and in the case of advance funding (such as the World Bank’s Pilot Program for Climate Resilience (PPCR) administered through the multi-lateral development banks), has led to the usual attempts at micro-management (as well as distortion by incentive structures in the donor institutions themselves). Shankland and Chambote’s (2011) case study of arguments over the allocation of PPCR funding in Mozambique illustrates this point very well.

6. Possible responses

Viewing the potential problems for adaptation policy arising from the experience of politics and governance in Africa raises the question of what might be done, especially by external actors who want to ensure that adaptive capacity is built and more successful adaptation achieved. Here again, much can be learned from existing experience about what has worked and not worked from other areas, especially aid effectiveness and governance reform.

One general lesson is that “history suggests that institutions change slowly and mostly endogenously” (Booth 2011a: s11) and that aid often doesn’t help (or indeed may make things worse). It is also the case that, as noted above, trying to impose a standard set of “best practice” institutions will not work (Rodrik 2007, Centre for the Future State 2010). Much current thinking in governance and development research implies that instead, external actors seeking to support institutional reform should seek the “best fit”, paying close attention to how existing institutions (informal and hybrid as well formal) in countries actually work, and which work better or worse in the provision of public goods and services (Booth 2011a).

Grindle (2011) points to some practical resources for how to find the “best fit”, based on Moore’s characterisation of states according to their degree of failure, and their stability capacity, and legitimacy. She makes the not unreasonable argument that in failed states, where there is no effective central control, no personal security or security of property, then more complex institutional reforms are bound to fail and are not a priority. Certainly, many of the kinds of policy or institutional changes implied by adaptation policy would seem to require what in Moore’s typology are called “minimally institutionalised states”.

Recent research on “best fit” interventions by the Africa Power and Politics Programme, reported in Crook and Booth (2011) has focused on local institutions, and is characterised as “working with the grain”. They emphasise that understanding the dynamics of local institutions and why they succeed or fail in providing public goods and services will require much deeper diagnostic effort by donors than is currently the case, and that effective support may often come better in the form of support for institutional reform than in large sums of money.

Applied to adaptation, this approach may to an extent overlap with the community-based adaptation (CBA) agenda, which also focuses attention on the idea of supporting local institutions that help solve collective action problems in the creation or deliver of public
goods and services for adaptation (Huq and Reid 2007). CBA may also be a kind of response to the problems of official climate finance noted above, if it involves routing resources directly to poor people instead of governments. However, these ideas need some caution, since a standpoint informed by a political and governance analysis can look somewhat different from the usual CBA approach. First, there will be limits to how far CBA is able to produce public goods and services for adaptation. For some of these, functioning, developmental national government will be needed. Second, an institutional perspective will be more concerned with the wider institutional landscape in which “community” sits than the classic CBA approach. Local institutions are not always consonant with “community”, so for example, local governments may be involved. Third, local and community actors themselves are not immune to rent-seeking and clientelism also operates at this level.

Another set of lessons from the politics and governance literature concerns improving service and public goods delivery through greater accountability. Through the 1990s and 2000s, the idea that the functioning of the state could be improved through mobilising voters and service users, often with the involvement of civil society organisations, gained great momentum (World Bank 1994). This was attempted at the national level, through the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process, and at the local level, where greater information and transparency about spending and entitlements was intended to play a vital role (see Hubbard 2007 for a critical discussion). However, Booth (2011b) argues that reviews of accountability, voice and empowerment programmes show that improvements in state provided services and public goods have tended to come from a combination of “bottom up” accountability and discipline imposed on service providers from above.

Achieving such simultaneous change in anti-developmental patrimonial systems is often challenging. In part this is because the logic of patrimonialism works against effective management of public service providers, on the “supply” side. But it is also because of problems on the “demand” side, where an inheritance of colonial political identity still leads people to think of themselves primarily as subjects of rulers or members of clans rather than citizens with rights (Moncrieffe 2004, Chabal and Daloz 1999), and limits autonomous demands on the state for better public goods and services. Overall, a realistic approach to improving adaptation policy through “accountability to citizens” is therefore needed, informed by an underlying political analysis.

7. Conclusion

In the development sphere, climate change is seen by some as a “game changer”, i.e. that it will transform all aspects of the development process, development policy and aid programming. However, the analysis presented here suggests that the opposite is true – that responses to climate change will actually fit into existing “rules of the game” (North 1990), the political institutions that shape wider development experience. Even where climate change might exacerbate pressures on resources and help fuel conflict, it does so in ways which are determined by existing political relationships, rather than leading to qualitative changes in those relationships (Raleigh 2010, Verhoeven 2011). A massive increase in climate finance may provide a new source of rent, and may help sustain anti-developmental patrimonial regimes in some sub-Saharan African countries, but again this would not be a new phenomenon.
This approach points to the need for the climate and development policy world to catch up with the institutions agenda, both in research terms and donor practice, and at the same time for political scientists and governance advisers in donor organisations to begin to pay more attention to climate policy. The review undertaken here has sketched out the main issues, and pointed towards a considerable potential future research agenda.

Despite the identification of “complex governance and institutional dimensions” in IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report as important factors determining vulnerability, current approaches to adaptation policy rarely engage with political and institutional realities. Almost all the debate on adaptation policy takes place in an unrealistic framework in which the political dynamics and deep rooted governance problems seen in Africa are abstracted from. Both amongst academics and in donor agencies a lot of effort is expended in debates about how emissions reduction, adaptation and poverty reduction can be achieved through “low carbon climate resilient development” and “triple wins”. These are fine as ideal goals, but have little relevance in contexts where the elite settlement means that regimes are uninterested a long term developmental agenda. Whether regimes are developmental or not should be of primary importance in thinking about adaptation policy. This is especially the case because the challenge of adaptation planning in the face of uncertainty, over long time periods and across sectors is so demanding. This approach remains relevant since although governance and economic management have improved somewhat in the region, many if not most African regimes are still not developmental in nature.
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