

From Talk to Action-Tackling Africa's Pollution and Climate Change Problem

Authors : Ngabirano Levis

Abstract : One of Africa's major environmental challenges remains air pollution. In 2017, UNICEF estimated over 400,000 children in Africa died as a result of indoor pollution, while 350 million children remain exposed to the risks of indoor pollution due to the use of biomass and burning of wood for cooking. Over time, indeed, the major causes of mortality across Africa are shifting from the unsafe water, poor sanitation, and malnutrition to the ambient and household indoor pollution, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions remain a key factor in this. In addition, studies by the OECD estimated that the economic cost of premature deaths due to Ambient Particulate Matter Pollution (APMP) and Household Air Pollution across Africa in 2013 was about 215 Billion US Dollars and US 232 Billion US Dollars, respectively. This is not only a huge cost for a continent where over 41% of the Sub-Saharan population lives on less than 1.9 US Dollars a day but also makes the people extremely vulnerable to the negative climate change and environmental degradation effects. Such impacts have led to extended droughts, flooding, health complications, and reduced crop yields hence food insecurity. Climate change, therefore, poses a threat to global targets like poverty reduction, health, and famine. Despite efforts towards mitigation, air contributors like carbon dioxide emissions are on a generally upward trajectory across Africa. In Egypt, for instance, emission levels had increased by over 141% in 2010 from the 1990 baseline. Efforts like the climate change adaptation and mitigation financing have also hit obstacles on the continent. The International Community and developed nations stress that Africa still faces challenges of limited human, institutional and financial systems capable of attracting climate funding from these developed economies. By using the qualitative multi-case study method supplemented by interviews of key actors and comprehensive textual analysis of relevant literature, this paper dissects the key emissions and air pollutant sources, their impact on the well-being of the African people, and puts forward suggestions as well as a remedial mechanism to these challenges. The findings reveal that whereas climate change mitigation plans appear comprehensive and good on paper for many African countries like Uganda; the lingering political interference, limited research guided planning, lack of population engagement, irrational resource allocation, and limited system and personnel capacity has largely impeded the realization of the set targets. Recommendations have been put forward to address the above climate change impacts that threaten the food security, health, and livelihoods of the people on the continent.

Keywords : Africa, air pollution, climate change, mitigation, emissions, effective planning, institutional strengthening

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