

>Policy

Why Kenya's climate change investment trends risk resilience



Vibrant strategy and mitigation measures are long overdue to ensure that policies put in place to ease the impact of economic activities on the environment yield the desired outcomes in line with global best practices, writes
Ms Edna Odhiambo

Tracking climate finance flows is useful in assessing whether Kenya is making informed policy decisions and investments towards climate action. Like many developing countries, Kenya's climate change goals are mainly adaptation oriented, in contrast to developed nations, which are mitigation centric. As a country nurturing our industry and manufacturing, emissions are still considered miniscule.

Yet, we remain hard hit by the impacts of climate change, such as droughts and floods, leading to food insecurity and significant loss of gross domestic product (GDP). With this backdrop, our climate policies and international commitments under the Paris Agreement, emphasise building resilience and reducing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

However, the current trend of climate finance is in stark

contradiction to our policy goals of building adaptive capacity, in order to secure a low carbon resilient economy. At present, only 11.7 per cent of climate finance tracked in the country is being channelled towards adaptation.

This implies misprioritization of climate investments, based on our realities. Markedly, these finances are not adequately directed to the sectors that need it the most such as water, agriculture and forestry. As a water scarce country, struggling to meet the ten per cent forest cover, yet heavily reliant on climate-vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and tourism, adaptation in these sectors is imperative.

An estimated 79 per cent is being directed towards mitigation, with renewable energy investments taking the lion's share. Undoubtedly, Kenya is proving to be a leader in the clean energy transition and valuable lessons, which can be

utilised in adaptation investments can be drawn from this sector. Are the benefits trickling down in the form of affordable electricity bills, or in the millions of households still reliant on firewood, charcoal and kerosene which are harmful to health and the environment?

So how do we increase investments that build our adaptive capacity while empowering citizens? A foremost step in adaptation planning is continuous risk assessments, which expose our most pressing vulnerabilities and lay a road map on how to address them. Robust risk assessments can only be undertaken if we invest in expanding our evidence base, through supporting action-oriented research. Adaptation and mitigation is very context specific. A coastal county's adaptation measures will mostly focus on sea level rise and flood management, whereas one in the breadbasket region will focus

on climate-smart agricultural practices such as crop diversification, drought tolerant crops, and water harvesting.

Adaptation is inextricably linked to people's daily lives, at the heart of it is empowering communities to survive and thrive, even in the wake of the adverse impacts of climate change. Co-design in climate change projects is becoming increasingly popular and should continue to be encouraged. This approach includes communities as equal partners in decision making from inception to completion, to allow for informal needs assessments, cultivate a sense of ownership and sustainability of projects.

Building adaptive capacity in the agriculture sector, the backbone of our economy, must contemplate a supportive ecosystem for smallholder farmers. Increasing revenue streams for farmers is paramount. Measures such as diversified weather information will equip farmers to plan more efficiently. Extension services, which in the past have proved to be successful, should be revived in counties. Engaging viable climate insurance schemes offers the potential to cushion farmers from losses, due to unpredictable weather. Access to quality inputs and finance supports higher yields, translating into improved food security and better livelihoods. Kenya is water insecure due

to much of the land being arid and semi-arid. The impacts of climate change exacerbate water scarcity. Water harvesting, treatment and storage are key to building adaptive capacity, to ensure the precipitation can consistently access clean water for domestic use and agriculture. Technologies such as sand dams offer potential as quick-win measures to enhance water security in semi-arid counties.

They are cheap structures that use local materials and labour to harvest rainwater.

Tree planting is a simple yet powerful tool for preserving water catchment areas and increasing our forest cover. Results-based payment schemes which are promoting the conservation of forests by paying communities to keep them intact, are creating socio-economic benefits while meeting climate change goals. This is an example of the innovative ways of maintaining and increasing forest cover. Several communities are already benefiting from such schemes.

A hungry and thirsty nation will not attain a thriving economy. As we call for increased investments in climate action, let us be guided by our realities and greatest needs.

The writer is an advocate of the High Court of Kenya and country lead, Climate & Development Knowledge Network

Tracking climate finance flows is useful in assessing whether Kenya is making informed policy decisions and investments towards climate action. Like many developing countries, Kenya's climate change goals are mainly adaptation oriented, in contrast to developed nations which are mitigation centric. As a country nurturing our industry and manufacturing, emissions are still considered miniscule. Yet, we remain hard hit by the impacts of climate change, such as droughts and floods, leading to food insecurity and significant loss of GDP. With this backdrop, our climate policies and international commitments under the Paris Agreement, lay emphasis on building resilience and reducing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

However, the current trend of climate finance is in stark contradiction to our policy goals of building adaptive capacity, in order to secure a low-carbon resilient economy. At present, only 11.7 % of climate finance tracked in the country is being channelled towards adaptation. This implies misprioritization of climate investments, based on our realities. Markedly, these finances are not being adequately directed to the sectors that need it the most such as water, agriculture and forestry. As a water-scarce country, struggling to meet the ten per cent forest cover, yet heavily reliant on climate-vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and tourism, adaptation in these sectors is imperative.

An estimated 79% is being directed towards mitigation, with renewable energy investments taking the lion's share. Undoubtedly, Kenya is proving to be a leader in the clean energy transition and valuable lessons which can be utilized in adaptation investments can be drawn from this sector. Are the benefits trickling down in the form of affordable electricity bills, or to the millions of households still reliant on firewood, charcoal and kerosene which are harmful to health and the environment?

So how do we increase investments that build our adaptive capacity while empowering citizens? A foremost step in adaptation planning is continuous risk assessments, which expose our most pressing vulnerabilities and lay a road map on how to address them. Robust risk assessments can only be undertaken if we invest in expanding our evidence-base, through supporting action-oriented research. Adaptation unlike mitigation is very context specific. A coastal county's adaptation measures will mainly focus on sea level rise and flood management, whereas one in the breadbasket region will focus on climate-smart agricultural practices such as crop diversification, drought tolerant crops, and water harvesting.

Adaptation is inextricably linked to people's daily lives, at the heart of it is empowering communities to survive and thrive, even in the wake of the adverse impacts of climate change. Co-design in climate change projects is becoming increasingly popular and should continue to be encouraged. This approach includes communities as equal partners in decision making from inception to completion, in order to allow for informed needs assessments, cultivate a sense of ownership and sustainability of projects.

Investments focused on realizing food security are of utmost importance. Building adaptive capacity in the agriculture sector, the backbone of our economy, must contemplate a supportive ecosystem for smallholder farmers. Increasing revenue streams for farmers is paramount. Measures such as downscaled weather information will equip farmers to plan more efficiently. Extension services which historically have proved to be successful in capacity building farmers with up-to-date practices, should be revived in counties. Exploring viable climate insurance schemes offers potential to cushion farmers against economic losses, occasioned by unpredictable weather patterns. Access to quality inputs and finance supports higher yields, translating into improved food security and better livelihoods for our farmers.

Kenya is water- insecure due to much of the land being arid and semi-arid and the impacts of climate change exacerbate water scarcity. Water harvesting, treatment and storage are key in building adaptive capacity, to ensure the population can consistently access clean water for domestic use and for agriculture. Technologies such as sand dams offer potential as quick wins to enhance water security in semi-arid counties. They are inexpensive structures, that utilize locally available materials and community labour to harvest rainwater.

Tree planting remains a simple yet powerful tool for preserving water catchment areas and increasing our forest cover. Results-based payment schemes which are promoting conservation of forests by paying communities to keep them intact, are creating socio-economic benefits, while meeting climate change goals. This is an example of the innovative ways of maintaining and increasing forest cover and a number of local communities are already benefiting from such schemes.

A hungry and thirsty nation will not secure a thriving economy. As we call for increased investments in climate action, let us be guided by our realities and greatest needs.