

Preparing parliament for the climate challenge in Ghana

Policy pointers

- **Effectively integrating** climate change into Ghanaian policy and practice requires capacity building at both individual (MPs) and institutional levels (parliamentary service staff).
- **Fragmented policy** frameworks and a lack of understanding about suitable responses to climate change are hampering the ability of parliamentarians in Ghana to shape appropriate local and national climate action.
- **Researchers, clerks and** other parliamentary service staff play a critical triple role — as knowledge guardians, impartial advisers and agenda setters — in framing an effective response to climate change.
- **Capacity building for the** differentiated needs of MPs and clerks in parallel with all parliamentary institutes and committees is required.
- **A dedicated cross-party** standing committee in parliament, mandated to exclusively consider climate change issues, could enable more effective scrutiny and oversight of government action on climate change.

Ghana has already begun to feel the impacts of climate change and needs strategies, tools and tactics to better respond to these at different levels. Parliamentarians here, as elsewhere, can play a vital role in ensuring appropriate climate-related policies. To do so they need more support to understand key issues and translate them from local to national to global levels and vice versa. But if MPs matter, so too do those working in parliamentary services. These support staff work across political cycles and can ensure the longevity of knowledge gains on climate change within parliament. They can drive priorities forward within parliamentary committees by supporting evidence-based policymaking through the provision of accurate information and impartial advice. Shaping more effective responses to climate change in Ghana requires the active engagement of MPs supported by their parliamentary service staff. Tailored capacity building efforts that address the different needs of both groups are required.

A triple role for MPs

Ghana has recently moved from low to lower-middle income status and has ambitious development aspirations. These achievements and aspirations are increasingly threatened by climate change. Climatic variability in Ghana is on the rise, marked by recurring droughts, unpredictable rainfall patterns and deteriorating health conditions. And the country's reliance on climate-sensitive sectors, such as forestry and small-scale agriculture — coupled with a lack of resilience in the energy sector — will only amplify adverse impacts. This is likely to be true for both the resource-poor North and the richer South.

If climate change is not to derail Ghana's development plans, the country's member of parliaments (MPs) must actively shepherd policy to ensure climate resilience. But the country's institutional, policy and legislative frameworks currently place significant obstacles in the way.

The critical roles of parliamentarians in shaping effective climate policy can be summed up in three words: representation, legislation and oversight.¹ They can bring constituents' concerns into national forums; influence climate-related policy underpinning legislation; and scrutinise governments' responses to local, national and international climate change issues, holding executives to account for their actions.

Cultivating coherence

Responsibility for climate change issues is spread across several ministries and committees (see Climate change policy: who is responsible?, overleaf). Many MPs have a loose comprehension of how powers are delineated between these different bodies, which makes it difficult for them to fulfil their oversight role and satisfactorily hold executives to account.

This challenge is compounded by the fact that parliamentarians rely on a committee system to

Poor understanding of climate change hampers MPs' ability to shape policy

scrutinise government action. The main committee for climate change is the Committee of Environment, Science and Technology — but its remit also encompasses all other environmental issues. This leads to very high workloads and also makes it difficult

to properly prioritise and integrate climate change across all policy areas, so impeding 'mainstreaming'.

Not only are the institutions responsible for setting climate change policy fragmented but so too is

the legislative framework. Some legislation does specifically incorporate climate change — for example, the Renewable Energy Act, the National Water Policy and the Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation — but these lack inter-relation and coherence.

A more joined-up approach can be seen in the Natural Resources and Environmental Governance (NREG) programme. This is a multi-donor, multi-sector budget support programme to improve the transparency of natural resource management and improve coordination across the government. But donor funding for this programme runs out this year, and some organisations, both foreign and domestic, have questioned the NREG's ability to continue promoting systematic planning without donor funds.³

Knowledge needs

Poor understanding of suitable responses to climate change can also hamper MPs' ability to shape effective policy. Many parliamentarians in Ghana acknowledge the importance of their role in addressing climate change challenges and impacts, but they lack the

fluency needed to confidently discuss and debate these topics. And while they often appreciate the immediate impacts of climate change for their constituents, they less often understand the long-term implications. This means that many MPs tend to be reactive, rather than proactive, in their efforts to create climate change policies.

The executive in Ghana does have significant technical knowledge on climate change, but this is not always filtered down to parliament or distilled into policy formulation. This leaves many MPs unfamiliar with the measures required to tackle climate change. Enacting the NCCPF umbrella policy should certainly help overcome this problem as it will provide MPs with a benchmark against which legislative measures can be judged. But progress on the NCCPF must be increased and more capacity-building effort is required to strengthen parliamentarians' expertise in the short- and long-term impacts of climate change, and the options available for tackling them.

Strengthening MPs' knowledge about climate change is not simply about boosting their understanding of appropriate responses. It is also about improving their awareness of Ghana's international activity and obligations.

Ghana has signed and ratified all the Rio Conventions,⁴ is vocal in international climate negotiations,⁵ and participates in the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility's programme for reducing emissions from deforestation, forest degradation, conservation and sustainable forest management (REDD+). But knowledge through participation in international forums remains concentrated with a limited number of individuals, who do not disseminate it across government. If parliamentarians are to act as a check on government's delivery on international duties — or to apply international decisions to local settings — they must be better informed about Ghana's activities on the world stage.

Beyond MPs

Climate change is a long-term and cross-cutting issue that outlives electoral cycles and affects every sector of an economy. This means that although MPs matter in framing an effective response, so too do the permanent institutions and civil servants that support them. MPs cannot perform their functions without researchers and clerks: if parliamentarians make up the 'nerve-endings'⁶ of a political centre, these parliamentary services are the 'nerve-centre'.

Parliamentary services in Ghana have multiple roles to play in addressing the climate challenge (see Figure).

Knowledge guardians. Parliamentary services help ensure knowledge spans one electoral cycle to the next

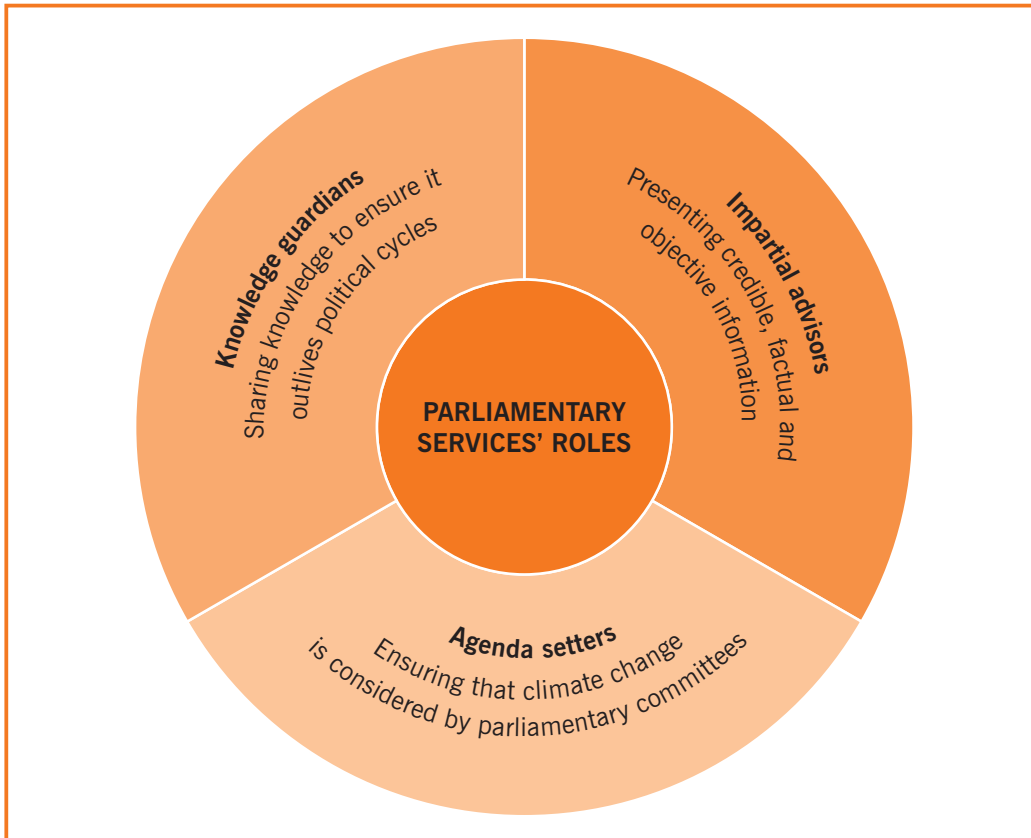
Climate change policy: who is responsible?

In theory, Ghana's vice president leads climate change policy at the executive level, as chairman of the Environment and Natural Resources Advisory Council (ENRAC). He is supported by the Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (MEST), which has the policy lead, and the Environmental Protection Agency, which has the technical one.

Beyond these three bodies, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning has a convening role for planning and budgeting, while a range of other ministries and bodies are responsible, to varying degrees, for implementation.² A further body — the National Climate Change Committee — is responsible for developing a national umbrella policy called the National Climate Change Policy Framework (NCCPF).

In practice, all of these could operate more efficiently: the ENRAC has only met a handful of times since being established in early 2010; the drafting of the umbrella policy has been long and protracted; and there is mixed evidence of climate change consideration across the policy spectrum, from MEST and the sectoral ministries.

Figure. The multiple roles of parliamentary services in addressing climate change in Ghana.



by briefing incoming parliamentarians on climate change issues and how specific issues are relevant to their own committees. In Ghana, the individual MPs making up government committees can come and go with each election but the parliamentary services staff assigned to these committees remain. Committee members rely on this staff's capacity to collate and submit information that clearly articulates both questions and answers about relevant issues. And research shows that clerks here not only transfer knowledge across committees over time, but they often also share information with colleagues attached to other committees on an informal basis.

Impartial advisers. Clerks and researchers are not only knowledge holders within parliament, but also knowledge gatekeepers. They are required to not just find information but also assure its credibility and provide MPs with politically neutral and impartial advice that is strictly factual and objective. MPs depend on the accuracy of the information they receive to ensure that the decisions they take are informed and rooted in evidence. But clerks and researchers can struggle to fulfil their role as impartial advisers. In part, this is because knowledge about climate change — both nationally and internationally — is evolving so quickly. But it is also because clerks and researchers often lack the capacity to assess the accuracy and reliability of their sources.

Agenda setters. Clerks help set the agenda within individual committees and have the potential to provide the all-important 'push' needed to either address specific needs, or to prioritise issues that have been marginalised or forgotten about during a change of government. They do not need extensive technical know-how on climate change — that is what the experts in the Environmental Protection Agency are there for — but a broad understanding of climate change can and should be achieved by clerks and researchers.

Confronting the climate challenge

Across Ghanaian Parliament, the idea of 'mainstreaming climate change' is catching on, indicating the desire and political will to integrate — and address — climate change more effectively across all committees in parliament.

But achieving this integration will require the whole of parliament to become more positively engaged. An essential first step will be capacity building of both MPs and parliamentary service staff. A tailored approach is key because, to a large extent, the two groups have different needs.

For example, on the one hand, MPs need to be better equipped to translate climate issues from local to national to global levels, and vice versa — being

provided with information that explains how global climate change can impact local livelihoods and that points to likely repercussions for their constituents. On the other hand, a more immediate priority for clerks and researchers is improving the MPs' access to reliable and up-to-date information in an appropriate and digestible format.

Both groups need support to build a long-term perspective on climate change. And both would benefit from more direct links to international organisations and other governments — so that they can do more to ensure the take-up of international best practices.

Any future information provision and capacity building must also work in parallel with all of parliament's institutions, adopting a universal approach that is closely aligned with the mandate of each committee. This will help facilitate the integration of relevant climate considerations across sectors and programmes and so promote 'mainstreaming'.

Supporting interested MPs and parliamentary staff to create a 'knowledge hub' within parliament could also enable more effective policy debates and the holding of government to closer account. The drive to do this must be led by parliament, but outside sources of support will be important to help build the hub's ability to operate efficiently.

Adopting a pragmatic approach to building the capacity of Ghana's parliament to tackle climate change — one that works within the strictures of existing institutional frameworks — is important. But that does not mean that reforming the architecture itself should be overlooked. There is plenty of scope for action to enable more effective scrutiny and oversight.

This could most likely take the shape of a dedicated cross-party standing committee in parliament that exclusively considers climate change issues, and seeks to ensure assimilation across policies, legislation and projects. Of course, creating such a committee would not be without challenges — if it is to work, it would need a very clear mandate, alongside sharply defined membership and resourcing. A new body would also need to be buttressed by a sound central policy on climate change by means of the NCCPF.

Combined, these tools and tactics could provide both the institutional and legislative measures needed for Ghana's parliament to resourcefully and strategically confront the climate change challenge.

■ CORINNE SCHOCH AND BARRY SMITH

Corinne Schoch (www.iied.org/users/corinne-schoch) is a researcher in IIED's Climate Change Group. Barry Smith is a consultant with IIED's Climate Change Group.

Notes

- ¹ Chandani, A. *et al.* 2011. *Climate change: an issue for parliamentarians in Southern Africa*. IIED Briefing. IIED, London.
- ² Cameron, C. 2011. *Climate Change Financing and Aid Effectiveness: Ghana Case Study*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and African Development Bank.
- ³ GhanaWeb. 6 June 2012. CSOs to strategies on sustainable ways of funding programmes. GhanaWeb Regional News. See www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/regional/artikel.php?ID=241172; Bird, N. *Ghana Natural Resource & Environment Governance (NREG) Review*. Project summary. Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London. See www.odi.org.uk/work/projects/details.asp?id=2236&title=ghana-natural-resource-environment-governance-nreg-review
- ⁴ The Rio Conventions include: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).
- ⁵ Wurtenberger, L. *et al.* 2011. *Initiatives related to climate change in Ghana: towards coordinating efforts*. The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN), London.
- ⁶ Coleman, O., Power, G. 2011. *The Challenges of Political Programming: International Assistance to Parties and Parliaments*. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Stockholm.

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Contact: Corinne Schoch
corinne.schoch@iied.org
 80–86 Gray's Inn Road,
 London WC1X 8NH, UK
 Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
 Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055
 Website: www.iied.org