Policy brief
Policy coherence for sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa

Headline issues

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change stress the need for coherent policies across sectors.
- Coherence faces many challenges, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and in the critical sectors of water, energy and food.
- With the forthcoming review of countries' Nationally Determined Contributions and implementation of the SDGs, there are opportunities to place coherence at the core of policy.

Summary

Cross-sectoral approaches to policy development are essential to meeting the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which define the post-2015 development agenda. Coherent policy development requires strategic, logical assessment of interlinkages, trade-offs and opportunities within and across sectors and over spatial and temporal scales.

For many countries realising policy coherence is challenging. Research in southern Africa highlights differing degrees of policy coherence from partial to weak and this is typical of many developing countries across sub-Saharan Africa.

Achieving sustainable development in the water, energy and food (agriculture) sectors requires policies that are closely aligned across sectors and with international commitments. National development strategies or policies should be developed to explicitly recognise climate change and the responsibilities of meeting the SDGs as key objectives. Sector policies should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure coherence with meeting these intentions.

Institutional structures and processes that enable cross-sectoral coordination need to be established, enabled and resourced to support and encourage policy coherence as a prerequisite to effective implementation.

> **"Actions and systems that are designed and implemented within the water–energy–food nexus in the next five to 10 years will be essential to supporting developmental objectives to 2030 and beyond"**

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an agenda for development to the 2030s. The 17 goals cover all aspects of development, from health and education to energy, climate change and partnerships. These goals and integral targets have been agreed by all 193 UN member states. The challenge is how to achieve them. A failure to coordinate the development of policies across sectors could lead to ineffective policy design or create barriers to enabling efficient implementation – barriers including lack of buy-in, conflicting mandates, misallocation of limited resources, and mixed signals for investment or action.

'Policy coherence' is widely recognised as necessary, but its meaning can change depending on the context. At its simplest, it is the need for a logical consistency across all dimensions of policy development and implementation (Meuleman, 2018). The need for coherent action through mutually supportive policies is integral to the SDGs and implied throughout. Developing mechanisms to support coherence forms part of goal 17 on the importance of partnerships and the need to work together to support action, and is explicitly included as target 17.4.1.

The importance of policy coherence is also demonstrated in goal 13 on climate action. This emphasises that the commitments within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement, should ensure policy coherence across different sectors in order to effectively address climate change challenges.

Implementing the global development agenda in sub-Saharan Africa

While addressing or correcting these potential impediments to implementation is a universal challenge, the barriers are most acute in developing countries. Sub-Saharan Africa includes 46 developing countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change (Niang et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the region is poised to develop rapidly in the coming decades. Many of the development opportunities are focussed on the three highly important and connected sectors relating to water, energy and food (agriculture) (often referred to as the water–energy–food nexus). Planning in all of these needs to take climate risk into account.

Developing countries generally face additional constraints due to the scale of their economic development needs, limited domestic resources and insufficient capacity to both design and implement the necessary interventions. The actions and systems that are designed and implemented within the water–energy–food nexus in the next five to 10 years will be essential to supporting the shape and success of developmental objectives to 2030 and beyond, and thus need to be considered together in planning now.

Developing and promoting coherent policies at all scales

Considerable efforts and progress have been made to incorporate climate change into national and sectoral policies globally, as part of drives to mainstream climate change concerns (Nachmany and Setzer, 2018). However, much of this progress has focussed on vertical integration, aiming to mainstream climate change issues and actions into particular sectors and the different policy levels and scales within them, rather than horizontal, cross-sectoral linkages (Runhaar et al., 2018). Horizontal coherence places a focus on interactions between sectors and institutions that operate at the same level of responsibility (regional, national or local) – see Figure 1 (p3).

Meuleman (2018) identifies three elements to support coherent policy development: for horizontal coherence there is the need to overcome silo thinking. For vertical coherence it is fundamental to support alignment,

collaboration and development at all levels of governance, and to include civil society, the private sector and development institutions, all of which must input into policy development and facilitate, support or finance implementation.

Because of the many different institutional structures, challenges and country contexts, there is no single way to ensure policy coherence. It is up to each country to adopt, develop or design the processes that are best suited to its circumstances. However, there are some common elements to consider (see Box 1, p4).

Cross-sectoral policy coherence for sustainable development

National climate change policies, as well as sectoral policies that include or are dedicated to climate change, are currently being developed and implemented across sub-Saharan Africa.

Examples of Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia

Analysis by England, Dougill et al. (2018) of the overall national and sectoral policy coherence for three countries in the region – Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia – produced scores for coherence ranging from 46–61%, where 100% marks optimum vertical and horizontal coherence. Broader regional policy studies show that these countries are lagging behind South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Swaziland in the way that they utilise sectoral policies to address issues of development, climate change adaptation and mitigation (England, Stringer et al., 2018b). In this respect, Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia have more in common with countries in West Africa (Antwi-Agyei et al., 2018) than with their southern African neighbours.

Figure 2 (p5) illustrates some of these challenges. It shows that there are typically higher levels of coherence

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Figure 1. Elements of policy coherence
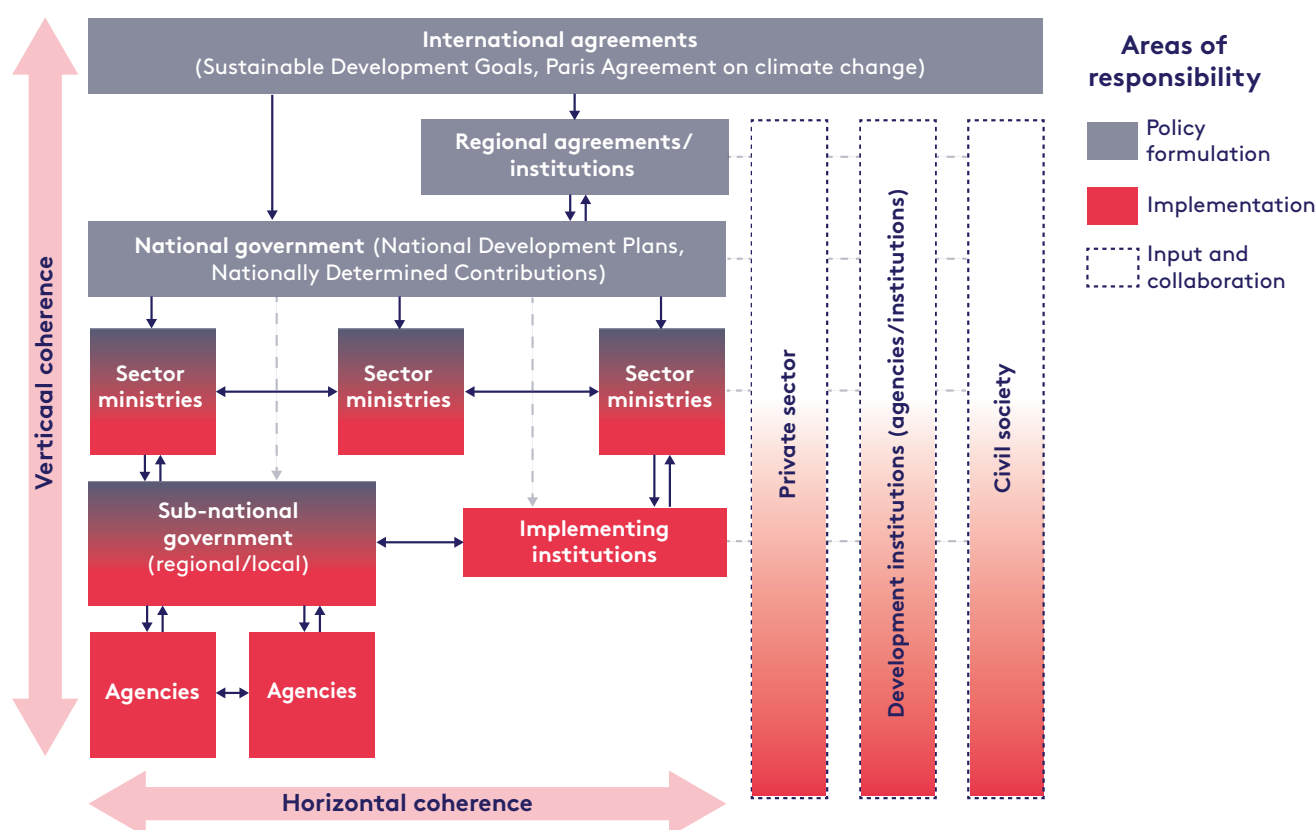
"The state of horizontal coherence between sectoral water, energy and food policies is either partial or weak "

between National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) and national climate change policies and also between some sectoral policies: for example, there are high levels of vertical coherence between Malawi's NAPA and agriculture policy, and between Zambia's NAPA and water policy. However, the state of horizontal coherence between sectoral water, energy and food policies is either partial or weak (England, Dougill et al., 2018). This weak coherence is also evident at national level between long-term development strategies such as national development plans and national level climate-related policies such as Nationally Determined Contributions and national climate strategies. For example, there is limited coherence between the water

and agriculture policies in Tanzania, and between the agriculture policy and NDC in Zambia.

Across Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia there are signs of progress on mainstreaming climate change issues arising from broader strategic policies into some sectoral policies and plans (vertical coherence). In particular, the agricultural sector has often taken a lead through the promotion of conservation and climate-smart agriculture practices (e.g. agroforestry, mulching and rotation) (England, Stringer et al., 2018). However, similar progress is lacking in other sectors. This is particularly the case in the energy sector, where in general climate change is addressed with a focus heavily dominated by mitigating emissions (Pardoe et

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Box 1. Building blocks for policy coherence for sustainable development

In 2016, nine countries undertook a voluntary review of their approach to supporting policy coherence for SDG implementation. From these reviews, a number of building blocks for policymakers were identified (OECD, 2017) that represent good institutional practice and, if followed, could serve to enhance coherence (Meuleman, 2018):

1. **Political commitment and leadership** – guide government-wide commitment to translate and align SDGs into concrete measures at all scales and actions of government.

2. **Integrated approach to implementation** – consider systematically the interlinkages between economic, social and environmental policy areas. Requires clear lines for reporting and communication.

3. **Inter-generational timeframe** – consider the long-term impact of policy decisions on future generations and actions across sectors and scales.

4. **Analysis and assessment of potential policy effects** – undertake evidence-based decisions on the trade-offs (positive and negative) at both the domestic and global levels.

5. **Policy and institutional coordination** – create effective multi-level mechanisms and legal frameworks – either formal or informal – to resolve conflicts or inconsistencies between sector ministries or implementing agents.

6. **Local and regional involvement** – support buy-in of local, regional and implementing agencies to deliver and inform policy objectives.

7. **Stakeholder participation** – support inclusion, ownership and informed input to policy development and implementation. Mobilise all resources and knowledge to support sustainable development.

8. **Monitoring and reporting** – promote adaptive management, evidence-based decision-making, capacity-building, communication and accountability.

al., 2017; Antwi-Agyei et al., 2018; England, Stringer et al., 2018). Consideration of energy's reliance on climate-related variables, for example water and rainfall variability affecting vital hydropower supplies, is also lacking in other countries in the region (Conway et al., 2018).

Challenges to supporting policy coherence in sub-Saharan Africa

For coherence, the timing of policy development matters. This is particularly relevant for those policies developed before global agreements like the SDGs or Paris Agreement were reached and targets agreed. Vertical coherence is more likely to be found in policies developed chronologically, for example, NAPAs in the mid-2000s as part of the international climate change process and then the suite of national climate change strategies or policies developed in the early 2010s.

Weak levels of horizontal coherence at the sector level tend to create similar degrees of incoherence between national level strategies (whether broader strategic development-focussed or climate change-specific plans) since they are often compiled directly from these sector policies. This results in strategic, long-term national policy formulation processes being directed by older, more siloed policies (see Figure 2). These problems are exacerbated as the science and understanding of actions or policy options evolve. Older sector policies are then misaligned with more recently developed national climate change-related policies, such as NAPAs or NDCs. This often happens

"For coherence, the timing of policy development matters"

Figure 2. Coherence and sectoral policy linkages in Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia

Note: Vertical axis represents year policy was developed

Source: Authors based on data from England, Dougill et al. (2018)
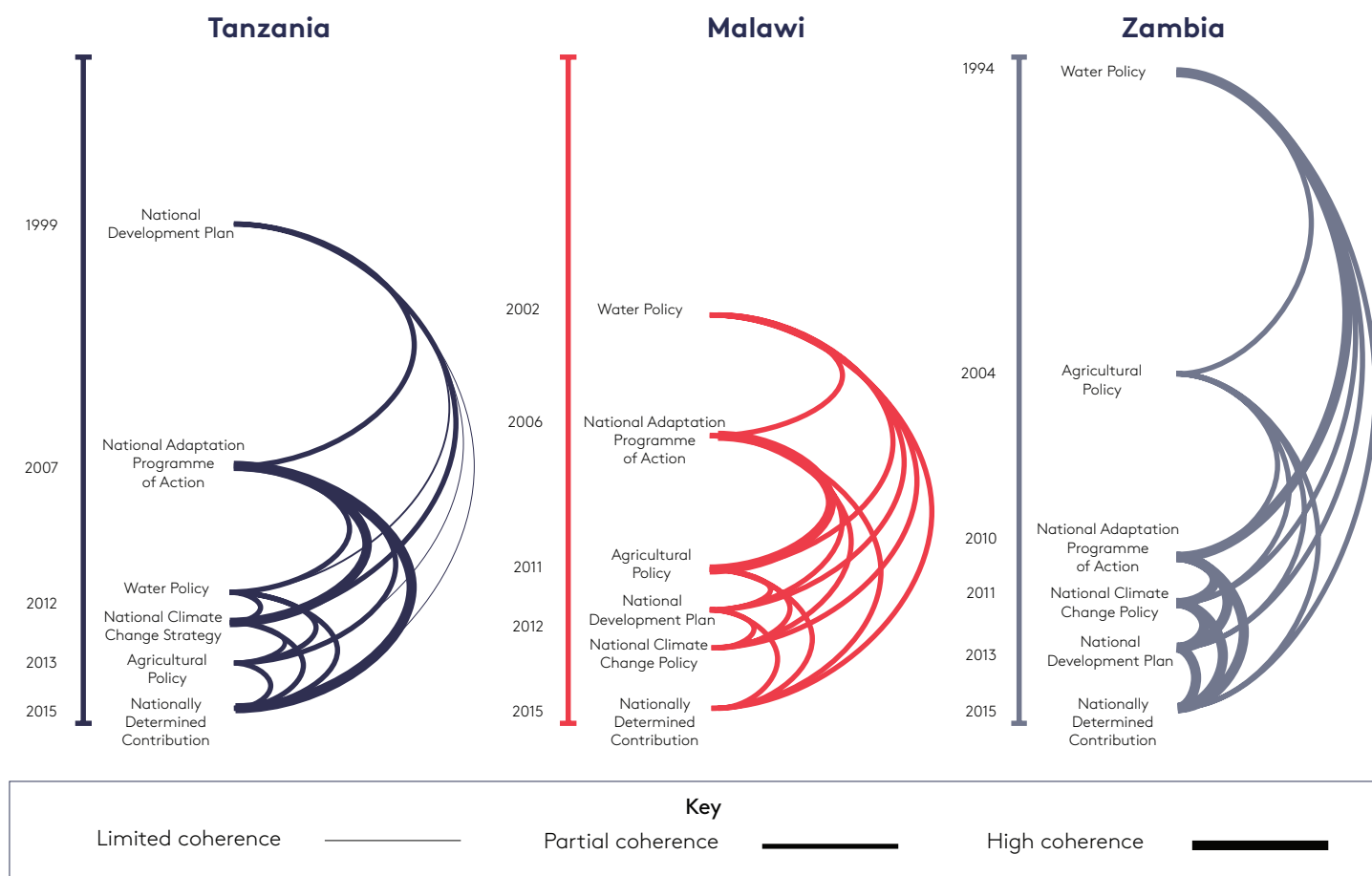
"Progress has been made where high-level support and leadership for climate change policies and plans are present and active"

because of poor understanding of the long-term impacts of climate change at a national, strategic level with the result that they are not explicitly addressed in policy formulation.

Coherence is also impeded where there is limited capacity or leadership to coordinate between sectors, undertake regular reviews, or institute a process to update and align national and sectoral policies. Ultimately, poor coordination both reflects and reinforces poor levels of policy coherence. This serves to entrench competition for resources and budgets and embeds the silo approach in policymaking and implementation where sectoral ministries are perceived as competitors rather than collaborators or implementing partners (England, Dougill et al., 2018; Pardoe et al., 2017).

External influences on coherent policy development

In sub-Saharan Africa, global policy processes, and the provision of external financial and technical support by developed countries or multilateral institutions, have influenced policy development. In particular, donor support and influence, often executed through external actors (usually international consultants or non-governmental organisations), can shape the coherence of national and sector-level policies. These external actors are usually tasked with supporting the development of a particular policy at a particular time, in line with the requirements of wider international agreements (England, Dougill et al., 2018).

This kind of support from donors can unintentionally undermine vertical and horizontal coherence. For example, the Sixth National Development Plan of Zambia was revised in 2013 to explicitly mainstream climate change. Revisions were carried out under the auspices of the Strategic Program on Climate Resilience within the Pilot Program for Climate Resilience

but resulted in simple references to older sectoral or national policies rather than explicit cross-sectoral coordination and alignment for all policies to achieve development outcomes. As such, these efforts were concentrated on one task in isolation from others without the sufficient connections made or facilitated to support coherence by national policymakers (ibid.).

Such efforts also often come with time pressures for delivery, against agreed international or domestic milestones. As a result, the space to enable effective coordination, or the ability to take a holistic, systematic view, is sometimes lost or diminished.

Actions taken to support coherence and collaboration

The barriers to enhanced coordination and coherence often stem from existing institutional arrangements and processes, including limited capacity, competition for sectoral budgets and longstanding traditions of siloed approaches. These factors can be further exacerbated by external influence (Pardoe et al., 2017). However, there are options to overcome or improve the system to support coherence.

Some of these factors are outlined in Box 1; there are also other encouraging country examples. In particular, progress has been made where high-level support and leadership for climate change policies and plans are present and active. In Malawi, for example, the Vice President acted as a champion for disaster risk reduction following extreme flooding in 2015 and instigated discussions on a cross-cutting National Resilience Strategy.

Such overarching initiatives and cross-sectoral platforms have been established in many sub-Saharan African countries. However, they often struggle to meet regularly and their effective functioning is impeded by reliance on donor funding, the receipt of which is beyond the control of the members. Further engagement is also often

restricted through challenges in sharing or distributing outside of platform participants. This makes buy-in and the effective functioning of these platforms challenging in the long term due to turnover of representatives and loss of institutional knowledge, especially into sectoral ministries.

Conclusions and recommendations

Cross-sectoral approaches to policy development are essential to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement across sub-Saharan Africa. Achieving sustainable development in the water, energy and food sectors requires policies that are closely aligned across sectors and with international commitments. Coherence has to exist within policies and strategies across all relevant sectors, informed by the latest evidence, and taking into account long-term impacts.

Mainstreaming of climate change concerns into national policies has gained traction, but policy coherence remains weak.

Policy coherence faces many challenges. This includes inconsistency in timeframes of policy development and resource constraints limiting the frequency of policy reviews. However, these challenges can be overcome with support for inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder fora, explicit recognition of the need for coherence and alignment when developing new policies, and use of robust evidence for what will work.

For coherence to translate into effective action, policies that are designed require clarity, stability and credibility over long periods, and across institutions and implementers, to support the long-term resource allocation, investment and action needed. Coherence is an essential enabler to support this.

We make the following specific policy recommendations.

Recommendation 1: National development strategies or policies should be reviewed, updated or developed to explicitly recognise climate change and the SDGs as key objectives, directed by detailed roadmaps.

- **National governments** should undertake this process in the next two years, led by senior political leaders and providing for a collaborative, multi-stakeholder, systematic approach that explicitly recognises trade-offs, interlinkages and opportunities within and between sectors.

- **National governments, or relevant sectoral ministries** with responsibility, should use the updated development strategies to guide NDC submissions and enable the ramping up of the 'ambition commitment' under the Paris Agreement.

- **Sectoral ministries** should support the development of national strategies and roadmaps, and then use these to guide the development, updating or review of their own policies and implementation plans to support alignment and coherence across sectors.

- **Regional institutions** should support linkages and learning processes, by establishing cross-sectoral platforms, such as multi-stakeholder forums, to build capacity and enable national and local governments to address cross-boundary challenges.

- **Donors** should explicitly recognise and place policy coherence as a key element of support programmes, including for the development of NDC updates. This should include providing for sufficient time, ensuring local-level participation and national political ownership in implementation of programmes, and providing sufficient resources.

Recommendation 2: Institutional arrangements that enable cross-sectoral coordination need to be established, enabled and resourced to support and encourage policy coherence.

"Mainstreaming of climate change concerns into national policies has gained traction, but policy coherence remains weak"

- **National governments** should establish and commit to regular inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder fora, such as Malawi's National Technical Committee on Climate Change, with high-level political leadership that meets regularly to develop and align national and sectoral policies, with key discussion points and actions being shared widely within participating ministries.

- **National governments, departments and implementing agencies** should actively participate in inter-departmental fora and engage regularly across sectors, to ensure legitimacy and implement joint decisions.

- **Finance ministries** should enable inter-ministerial fora, such as the National Climate Change Secretariat in Zambia, rather than allocating budgets solely by sector.

- **Donors and non-governmental organisations** should actively engage and support multi-stakeholder coordinating fora and consider supporting Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAps) that enable Multi Donor Trust Funds to enable coordinated expenditure in line with nationally-determined priorities.

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