Climate Change, Policymakers and Smallholder Agricultural Productivity

ABOUT THIS BRIEF
Over the years, Ghana has implemented several climate-related initiatives in various parts of the country, but they do not consider the complexity involved in simultaneously promoting the country’s development agenda and the climate change challenges smallholder agriculture will face. This Policy Brief looks at the situation of the smallholder farmer in Ghana in relation to emerging climate change impacts and makes suggestions for policymaking. It discusses the need for sensitisation of policymakers to climate change so they can protect smallholder farmers and their contribution to the national economy.

BACKGROUND
The term smallholder is usually used to describe a category of farmer in reference to his or her holding size, wealth, market orientation and vulnerability to risks. The holding size criterion is used here and is meant to refer to the average rural Ghanaian farmer who cultivates not more than 2 ha of land.

Smallholder farmers are indeed prevalent within Ghana’s rural economy. More than three-quarters of producer households are farming on less than 3 ha, which is close to the national average. Although smallholdings constitute the bulk of farms throughout the country, there are some discernible regional differences, e.g. the smallest smallholdings (less than 1 ha) are mostly prevalent in the south, while holdings at the larger end of the (smallholder) spectrum are more prevalent towards the north. However, farmers in the north have lower land productivity and lower market access.

THE PROBLEM
The fact that smallholder agriculture tends to be low input appears to be reflected in the overall production patterns of staple crops in Ghana. This notion contradicts rural development objectives of increasing output from commodities in which smallholders are the primary producers (e.g. root crops and grains, particularly maize). The smallholder will definitely face challenges in increasing productivity while managing expansion, especially in this current situation of climate change.

Climate change scenarios indicate substantial losses in the production of food staples linked to drought and rainfall variation, especially in areas of sub-Saharan Africa, where projected revenue losses due to loss of arable land would amount to about 26% by 2060. Such an impact on agricultural production would directly influence food security, leaving 600 million people facing malnutrition by 2080 in addition to predictions that do not take climate change into consideration. Another crucial risk factor, especially for many African societies, is the heightened water insecurity. By 2080, climate change could increase the number of people facing water scarcity around the world by 1.8 billion. Regions in sub-Saharan Africa that are especially susceptible to drought are considerable. Overall, smallholder and subsistence farmers will suffer impacts of climate change that will be locally specific and hard to predict. The variety of crop and livestock species produced by individual households and the importance of non-market relations in production and marketing will increase the
complexity of both the impacts and the subsequent adaptations to climate change.

WHY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE IS IMPORTANT IN THIS DISCUSSION

The concept of climate change, and its impacts, is uncertain and still being debated, even though its reality is already being experienced by many people around the globe. Addressing issues of climate change impacts have been made complex by those who should be taking action; consequently, motivating them demands extra caution. This is because of the way some policymakers receive and act on scientific facts about climate change. Many times political expediencies rather than urgency of the issue prevail.

It is against this backdrop that a sensitisation effort, or creation of awareness, is made to gauge the preparedness of policymakers and other stakeholders to embrace climate change policy and assist to implement it across the country, from grassroots at the local level through traditional areas and districts to the national level.

POLICY DIRECTION

The following issues should be considered when preparing climate change policies:

1. The National Climate Change Committee (NCCC) should be given legal backing to assume executive powers.
2. The National Climate Change Policy Framework (NCCPF) must, as a matter of urgency, prioritise the following:
   i. Raise awareness among decision/policymakers about climate change impacts and their management;
   ii. Create a policy framework for climate-resilient and low-carbon economic growth that is compatible with and integrated into national development plans and budgeting processes;
   iii. Provide a mechanism for implementing and financing the policy framework;
   iv. Create the foundations for the development of detailed sector-specific implementation plans; and
   v. Link and harmonise existing climate change initiatives and opportunities.
3. Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) should take cognizance of MoFA’s strategy in the Medium Term Agriculture Sector Investment Plan (METASIP) and use it to raise climate change impact awareness to protect smallholder farmers.
4. All Ministries, Departments and Agencies, as a way of sensitising policymakers, should develop strategies related to climate change.