Climate proofing development cooperation through impact assessment: a policy arrangement perspective

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1. The emergence of climate proofing

1.1 The bigger picture

In a context of global anthropogenic climate change, the international development cooperation sector cannot escape from the challenge of reinventing itself (Gupta, 2009), as it not only needs to 'climate-proof' its day-to-day activities (such as projects, bilateral and multilateral funding programmes, capacity building initiatives,..); but it also needs to reposition itself in an increasingly complex global system with new players generating negative climate externalities on an unparalleled scope and pace (IPCC, 2007).

The rise of climate change issues on the international political agenda, the visible and projected consequences and costs of climate change in the South (Stern, 2006), as well as the acknowledgement of the interrelationships between food security, vulnerability, aid efficiency and poverty reduction have all contributed to create a sense of urgency for integrating climate concerns into development cooperation. The key paradox of global anthropogenic climate change is that the countries of the global South did not create the problem, but they will -and they already do- suffer most of the negative consequences such as devastating extreme weather events, lower agricultural yields and increased disease burdens (Hicks et al., 2008).

There is considerable agreement on the necessity to take action, and this 'climate action' takes on different shapes: at the macro-level, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations are struggling with the keystone principle of 'common and differentiated responsibility' whereby the OECD countries that caused the bulk of the historical emission burden would act first, and only after doing so would poorer countries begin to take action. The recent global geopolitical and economic changes have made the international climate negotiations even more complex, as China, a historically 'low greenhouse gas emitter', has become the world's largest emitter in the early 21st century (EPA, 2008), which has led to a polarization of positions regarding national duties and responsibilities. Some of the more notable 'tangible' international climate action initiatives include the plethora of multilateral, bilateral and national climate funds[1] (the 'flexible mechanisms' of the UNFCCC such as the Clean Development Mechanism (UNFCCC, 2013); various private carbon offsetting programmes; the European Union's Emissions Trading System (EC, 2013); community-based adaptation schemes (IEED, 2013) etc.

All these initiatives were developed to respond to global climate change, but they require considerable institutional and policy change, as well as a great amount of human and

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[1] www.climatefundsupdate.org presents information on climate finance initiatives designed to help developing countries address the challenges of climate change.

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financial resources, which will then hopefully lead to changed patterns of production and consumption, which are to be less carbon-intensive. However, next to the non-exhaustive list of the abovementioned 'big initiatives', short-term, effective and efficient actions are highly needed to cope with climate change.

This has led to the emergence of 'climate mainstreaming'. Climate mainstreaming refers to the crosscutting integration of climate change concerns in policies, plans and programmes by all the involved actors in development cooperation -governmental & non-governmental actors in North and South. This means that climate change issues need to be integrated in existing and planned initiatives that do not necessarily have a climate focus – climate needs to be 'everywhere'. In the development cooperation sector, climate shares this 'crosscutting' requirement with other key issues such as HIV/AIDS and gender.

1.2 Climate proofing tools

The concept of climate 'mainstreaming' is often operationalized through 'climate-proofing' (defined as any modification in existing or future projects so that they are more resilient to climate change impacts and so as to reduce their own greenhouse gas emissions) in development cooperation has materialized through a mushrooming of impact assessment-inspired tools, which in practice tend to focus on adaptation (Nkoana et al., in preparation; IISD, 2007) – entailing the adjustment of human and natural systems to a changing climate by increasing the resilience to multifaceted systemic shocks- while sidelining mitigation, which should aim at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Ideally, climate-proofing tools should however consider both the impact of the development intervention on the climate, as the risks faced by the intervention due to changing climate conditions. This two-sided relationship is not always reflected in the existing tools – which tend to focus on risk, and hence also focus on suggesting adaptation measures to reduce climate risks (Hugé & Waas, 2012). A holistic, impact & risk-assessment of development interventions would be in tune with the overarching concept of sustainable development, which aims at strengthening the long-term resilience of human and natural systems.

This brief outline of the context in which climate proofing tools in development cooperation emerged may suggest a highly complex situation, triggering questions such as: How can climate-proofing tools best be developed and applied? What are the linkages between climate proofing tools and other types of climate action in the development cooperation sector? How do these tools 'work' in practice?

In order to shed light on the dynamics of climate-proofing tools in development cooperation the Belgian KLIMOS Research Platform[2] is currently analyzing the practical application of these tools by way of an framework which recognizes the importance of discourse underpinning any concrete climate action.

1.3 Theoretical framework: Discourse Analysis

Any climate proofing tool reflects a particular interpretation of what climate change means, mirrored in the impacts and/or risks that need to be assessed, in the delimitation of the scope of the climate proofing exercise, and in the actors involved.

The array of interpretations of climate change in a context of development cooperation reflects particular perceptions, which, when shared amongst a group of people and/or organizations, become discourses. A 'discourse' is then a shared, structured way of apprehending the world (Hugé et al., 2013). Discourse refers to paradigms, utopias and policy programmes. Discourses dominate decision-making by providing a bias in conceptualizing a policy issue and in conceiving solutions to those problems. This growing recognition of the role of discourse in devising solutions to cope with climate change is not –yet- matched by a parallel interest in the role of discourse in some of the most visible climate action initiatives on the ground: the widely used climate- proofing tools.

Yet the conceptualization and application of climate proofing are both highly dynamic, and are continuously influenced by actor-mediated discursive and institutional change (Runhaar, 2009). These influences led to a wide variety of experiences in assessment practice which reflect different assumptions, resources and perspectives. These assumptions are often not made explicit, pointing to the relevance of novel approaches such as discourse analysis (Hugé et al., 2012) to understand climate-proofing.

Climate-proofing tools are prime arenas where underlying assumptions and perspectives with regard to climate change surface. Yet, interpretations and discourses do not exist in isolation: they are linked to actors and to their respective power, as well as to the 'rules of the game' (institutions) in a particular setting. Hence climate-proofing tools are an interesting research topic to analyze the relationship between discourse and practice.

1.4 Research objectives

- To analyse the use and perception of Impact Assessment-inspired climate-proofing tools in the Belgian development cooperation sector.

- To use qualitative analytical methods to explore the elements of discourse, actors, rules and resources in climate proofing practice.

2. Materials & methods

2.1 The policy arrangement approach

In order to understand how discourse relates to the practice of climate proofing in development cooperation, we used the policy arrangement approach (PAA), developed by Arts et al. (2006), and applied by Runhaar (2009) on impact assessment practice.

The policy arrangement approach (PAA), allows us to understand how a policy practice (*in casu* climate-proofing exercises in development cooperation) are shaped in terms of organisation (actors, resources & rules) and substance (discourse). Actors include government officials (funding agencies) and NGOs in North & South, aid beneficiaries, and scientists providing advice. Each of the four elements of the PAA is divided into sub-elements. 'Discourse' refers to paradigms, utopias and policy programmes; 'rules' refer to

legislation, procedures and political culture; 'actors' refers to actor constellations, interaction patterns, coalitions and oppositions; and 'resources' refer to power relations and political influence (Runhaar, 2009).

2.2 Two explorative case studies

We applied the PAA framework in support of the interpretation of climate-proofing exercises by way of the application of the KLIMOS Environmental Sustainability Toolkit: a climate-proofing tool that was jointly developed by the official Belgian development cooperation (DGD and BTC) and the KLIMOS Research Platform[3].

- Case study 1: Climate-proofing applied by the Belgian development cooperation in African partner countries: Belgian official development actors (DGD and BTC) applied the KLIMOS toolkit on three project interventions in Rwanda, Uganda and Benin in 2010-2012.

- Case study 2: Climate-proofing applied by a South African university on a higher education cooperation project in South Africa: the University of Limpopo applied the KLIMOS toolkit on an ongoing sustainable higher education project.

The results were gathered through a combination of document analysis and interviews with actors from the Belgian development cooperation (officials (n=4) and NGOs (n=2)) and in South Africa (university staff; n=2).

The application of the PAA reported here is a first step in an ongoing broader research project on the conceptualisation, use and effectiveness of climate proofing tools in development cooperation.

3. Results & Discussion

Table 1: A PAA-analysis of climate-proofing development cooperation through two case studies

	Discourse	*Rules*	*Actors*	*Resources*
Case 1: Climate proofing applied by the Belgian development cooperation	• Climate change as part of broader sustainability concept; • Climate proofing tool as 'Trojan	• Unclear objectives of climate proofing to outsiders: decision-support or evaluation?	• Governmental actors perceive themselves as early adopters & facilitators w.r.t. climate-proofing; • NGOs	• Dominance of Northern perception of climate proofing not challenged;

[3] The tool can be accessed at: www.vub.ac.be/klimostoolkit. The tool consists of a screening note (entailing a questionnaire structured following different climate & environmental issues) and a database which provides the necessary background information needed to find answers to the screening note's questions.

	• horse' to mainstream other crosscutting issues; • Mitigation and adaptation intrinsically linked; • Disaster risk reduction is not a prominent discourse.	• What about the influence on funding? • Needs of desk officers and field organisation are different – one or more tools needed?	perceive governmental climate-proofing efforts as command & control; • Southern actors ('recipients') show enthusiasm over the tool, but are cautious w.r.t. implications;	
Case 2: Climate proofing applied on a South African higher education cooperation project	• Climate change linked to visible changing weather patterns. • Adaptive rather than transformational perception of climate change.	• Tool seen as a voluntary, useful support in taking practical decisions. • Tool not directly linked to university policy; focus on day-to-day environmental management.	• Tool used by staff, not (yet?) by students. • No external actors involved except scientists acting as 'helpdesk'.	• Support of high-level decision-makers is better, but not required for rapid practical changes w.r.t. adaptation

4. Conclusion

The policy arrangement approach (PAA) can be a useful analytical framework to understand the conceptualisation, the use and the effectiveness of climate-proofing tools in a context of development cooperation. It recognizes that impact-assessment inspired climate proofing tools are not merely technical tools reflecting a utopian 'technical' perspective on climate change and the way to address it. Climate action is highly influenced by prevailing discourses about responsibilities and about –perceived- degrees of feasibility; as are climate proofing tools. The existence of a 'common currency' to measure the effectiveness of climate action (the quantity of greenhouse gas emissions) masks the complexity of climate action in a North-South context and does not take adaptation into account. If policy-makers, scientists and practitioners are to 'mainstream' climate change considerations in their decisions, a better understanding of how these decisions come about, and how impact assessment tools are a reflection of the dynamics of discourse, actors, rules and resources is necessary. The presented research results are preliminary, and a further refinement of the PAA application

on climate proofing will be performed in the near future. This will allow to understand the varied contexts in which impact assessment-inspired climate-proofing tools are developed and applied.

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