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25 Ghana, Burkina Faso and Kenya WISE-UP to Climate Change

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THE climate change phenomenon and how best countries can mitigate the impacts or adapt to them continues to be a priority issue of concern worldwide. Of particular concern to the international community is the high level of vulnerability of African countries to climate change. This is because their economies, which are mostly natural resources based (agriculture, mining, fishing, etc.) are highly sensitive to climate change and climate variability. Consequently, the United Nations, World Bank and other international organisations agree that Africa will be worst hit by climate change.

They predict the phenomenon will bring about an increased incidence of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, mudslides; as well as a rise in infectious diseases. Recent news reports from Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Burkina Faso and parts of Ghana, attest to the fact that these incidents are already happening and in alarming ways and dimensions. What is worrying is that African countries are least prepared for climate related changes and will require the most efforts to adapt especially as they are already overwhelmed with challenges including poverty and food security. The worrying thing is that in their attempts to address the poverty and food security challenges, natural ecosystems of African countries are compromised in such a manner that they are unable to provide their services, which underpin the security of water, food and energy.

PARTNERSHIP

In a show of solidarity, the UN System, development partners and international organisations as well as academic institutions have been helping to build the resilience of African countries against climate change through various initiatives. Some of the initiatives like the African Adaptation Project funded by the Japanese government through the UNDP have ended, while others like the REDD + with funding from the World Bank are on-going. Of late, other initiatives have emerged that are more research based such as CUM-WARN, the Political Economy of Climate Compatible Development and now WISE-UP to Climate.

WISE-UP is the acronym for Water Infrastructure Solutions from Ecosystem Services underpinning Climate Resilient Policies and Programmes. It is a global partnership involving the Water Research Institute (WRI) of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSRI) in Ghana; the African Collaborative Centre for Earth System Sciences (ACCESS) of the University of Nairobi, Kenya; and the [International Water Management Institute \(IWMI\)](#). Others are the UK Overseas Development Institute (ODI); the University of Manchester; the Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

This partnership has brought together a wide variety of expertise including resource scientists, engineers, computer modellers, governance and political economists, water managers and climate change specialists. WISE-UP is being funded by the International Climate Initiative (ITI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU).

They are working together over a four-year period to demonstrate that natural ecosystems or infrastructure are nature based solutions for climate change adaptation and sustainable development, The essence of the demonstration is that without healthy ecosystems in well-functioning watersheds, the infrastructure built for irrigation, hydropower or water supply may not function sustainably, let alone achieve the economic returns necessary to justify investments made.

An example of this situation is the negative impact that illegal mining activities popularly known as "galamsey," is having on water supply in the Sekondi- Takoradi Metropolis. An official of the Water Company Limited hinted that "the company is now able to treat for distribution only half of the volume of water it used to a couple of years ago." He attributed this to "galamsey," which has totally polluted river Pra, the source of raw water for the company. Therefore, the company is unable to meet the water needs of the Metropolis in spite of its teeming population of including migrants in search of "oil money."

WISE-UP acknowledges that water security is vital for a sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. Hence, countries make investments in water infrastructure for storage and flood control, water availability and accessibility, and to reduce disaster risks. The fact remains however that these investments plus their benefits are not always equitably distributed, especially in developing countries.

The project is therefore advocating investments that combine natural and built infrastructure in the areas such as water, food and energy security; and industrial development and wealth generation. The point is that benefits are

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enhanced when ecosystem services are linked more directly into water infrastructure development.

For instance, forests and wetland ecosystems as well as built water filtration facilities all provide clean drinking water. However, where water filtration facilities are built to take advantage of the natural ecosystem, the benefits are outstanding. Denmark has taken advantage of such a combined infrastructure and City Authorities are providing clean water for their residents. The country's policy for water supply does not allow the collection, treatment and distribution of surface water that often requires treatment with chemicals because of pollution. Rather bore holes are sunk at a depth of between 60 to 80 metres, at which water is completely naturally filtered. So drinking water in Denmark is naturally clean and absolutely free of chemicals.

WISE-UP is focusing on river basins, because the project implementers are of the view that, basin ecosystems provide an environment where optimum outcomes can be achieved for poverty reduction, ecosystem management, economic growth and climate resilience. These will be attained through diverse activities such as assessments of natural infrastructure in the Volta and Tana basins, economic assessment including returns on investments for natural and built infrastructure options, innovation drivers like opportunities for new policies and investment strategies identified and promoted, and action learning, which is a platform for learning by doing with decision makers and stakeholders participating in dialogues and negotiations.

COMMITMENT

As part of activities under the WISE-UP partnership, stakeholders met recently in Akosombo, Ghana to create a network and platform for continuous engagement on the project, to identify benchmarks, scientific and capacity building needs for implementing project activities and to enable the Ghanaian and Burkinabe stakeholders familiarise themselves with the WISE-UP project, its implementation modalities, intended outcomes and their roles in the project.

The Minister of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation, Dr. Joe Oteng-Adjei commended the WISE-UP project for coming up with tools and resources that will enable beneficiaries to handle the adverse impacts of climate change in a smart manner and with a united front. He cautioned members to stay and work together to ensure success saying "coming together is the beginning, staying together is progress, but success will come only if we agree to work together." Touching on the application of science and technology in the WISE-UP project,

Dr. Oteng-Adjei stated: "there is absolute political will to create the enabling conditions for science and technology development in Ghana, adding, "Government has the patience for the exploration of scientific and technological activity that seeks to enhance the economic well-being of our people and is in consonance with our better Ghana agenda." Later in response to the issue of inadequate funding for scientific research, the Minister explained that Ghanaian scientists need to justify investments that have been made in the sector by coming up with and making available to the people, socially relevant and economically viable research findings with practical recommendations.

In his address, the Coordinator of Water Research Projects of the IUCN Head office in Switzerland, Dr. James Dalton admitted that the challenge of science is to produce better results for development. He added that the WISE-UP partnership is utilising a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach that will enable scientists and decision makers to understand issues better and make informed and appropriate decisions.

The Director of the Water Research Institute, Dr. Joseph Ampofo noted that the success of the WISE-UP project depends on the commitment and enthusiasm of the individuals and institutions involved. He urged stakeholders in the Volta basin to be mindful of their activities as whatever happens in one country is bound to impact on the other.

The Volta Basin contact person, Dr. Emmanuel Obuobie also of the Water Research Institute, said activities relating to energy and agriculture are of prime importance to the project, and hoped stakeholders would help build the institutional capacity required to facilitate the Successful implementation of activities.

Source: Ghanaian Times

