

TOWARDS A STRATEGY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE: VULNERABILITY AND ADAPTATION IN THE UPPER ZAMBEZI VALLEY REGION OF WESTERN ZAMBIA

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This paper studies climate change and variability, its impacts on local peoples in the Upper Zambezi Valley area of central southern Africa and the potential adaptation to the potential negative impacts of climate related dynamics. It dovetails physical and human processes and dynamics in order to make an analysis of the current situation. This takes into account the fact that climate change and adaptation take place in an arena of social dynamics that impact on both the production of environmental change and delimit the action that can be taken.

Current climate dynamics are examined on different geographical scales together with likely climate change scenarios. These are then weighed against vulnerabilities faced by the region and its peoples. These vulnerabilities are impacted by politico-economic and socio-cultural dynamics that exacerbate vulnerabilities. One of the main arguments raised in the paper surrounds the theory that no study into physical processes that impact on human security and development is complete without substantive research by social scientists specialising in the relationship between humans and their physical environment.

The study further argues that research into adaptation tends to reveal unrealised potential among existing resources as well as overexploitation, often within the same study region. Vulnerability, meanwhile, is exacerbated by social dynamics such as poor economic performance, poor governance, lack of institutional capacity, poor communications and poor infrastructure. The paper concludes by listing various adaptation possibilities and the condition under which these should take place but accepts that these remain largely untested as very little evidence of adaptation strategies and their success or failure has been published to date. Therefore the study remains a work in progress.

Keywords: Climate change, Environments, Vulnerability, Adaptation