

The Political Economy of Local Food System Governance: Impacts on climate-vulnerable communities in the Lake Victoria border region

Around Lake Victoria in East Africa, food systems are increasingly threatened by rising water temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, prolonged periods of drought, crop, and livestock diseases. As a region with one of the world's highest population growth rates, these changes increasingly result in food shortage and rising commodity prices, which, taken together, pose immediate threats to local communities' food security and livelihoods (Ericksen, 2008: 233; WMO, 2020). Poor communities, who depend on well-functioning food systems for consumption and to secure their livelihood, are hit disproportionately hard (FAO et al., 2022: 16; Chevallier et al., 2022; Alphonse, 2017). We refer to such communities, whose food and livelihood security are vulnerable to climate change, as climate vulnerable communities. This includes, for example, small-scale farmers dependent on subsistence agriculture, and small-scale traders engaged local crop and food distribution (Shimwela et al. 2016; Wasswa et al, 2021; Gotor et al. 2022).

With climate change as an inescapable backdrop, local governments in the region play a key role in safeguarding the food and livelihood security of climate vulnerable communities and promoting sustainable food production and consumption. Better than central government, they can ideally identify local needs (Erk, 2015) understand these contextual specifics than the central government. After all, the local government level "remains the level at which citizens engage with the state and where they are most directly affected by food policy and service delivery performance" (Resnick, 2022: 24). However, often, the role of local governments in food system governance is either unclear, neglected, or simply assumed in national policies and in the academic literature. While local governments are not the only actors involved in decisions and processes affecting local communities' food and livelihood security, we know little about the role they play in local food system governance vis-à-vis civil society organizations, companies, farmers, traders, individual community members, or donors (Resnick, 2022; Berkum et.al, 2017; Kang et.al, 2022; Nordhagen and Demmler, 2023). Consequently, we need to know more about how local food system governance is situated within national food governance systems and country specific political economic contexts. We also need to deepen our understanding of how food system governance is implemented at the local level, and how these processes are shaped by local government capacity and autonomy and encounters between the state and climate vulnerable communities. Lastly, we see a need for a greater understanding of how local communities perceive and experience climate change-related threats to food and livelihood securities, and local food system governance aimed at addressing them.

The overall purpose of the research project is, therefore, to comparatively study *the effects of local food system governance (policies, decisions, and implementation processes) on the food and livelihood security of climate vulnerable communities in the Lake Victoria border region*. To comparatively study how local food system governance affects local communities' food and livelihood security, the research setting must be a region with the same agroecology and climate change-related challenges, but where the food system and the local communities are governed by two different national and local political systems. To this end, this research project

focuses on the Lake Victoria border region between Tanzania and Uganda. This border region constitutes one eco-system, which implies similar livelihood systems, similar or comparable systems of cropping and livestock keeping and a shared culture (Rugalema and Mathieson, 2009). Moreover, on both sides of the border, communities face the same climate change-related challenges to food and livelihood security (Shimwela et al. 2016; Gotor et al. 2022). Lastly, while the agricultural context, climate change and food system challenges are similar on each side of the Uganda-Tanzania border, the political context is not. Local governments in the border districts are embedded in different food governance systems and political settlements. As such, the institutions and power relations characterizing the social order (Khan, 2010) and, therefore, the contextual settings of local food system governance differ across the border (Whitfield et al., 2015; Kjær et al., 2023). We use this variation as a stepping stone towards studying the political economy of local food system governance on each side of the Uganda-Tanzania border and its effect on communities' food and livelihood security in the border region.

Work packages

Focusing on the political economy of local food system governance and its implications for the food and livelihood security of climate vulnerable communities in Uganda/Tanzania border districts of the Lake Victoria region, the research project is comprised by three inter-related work packages.

- Work package 1 (WP1) focuses on the institutional setups and policies of national and local food systems governance. It maps food governance systems, and situates local governments within the national political settlement. The purpose is thus to understand the national food system governance, i.e., the policy initiatives, decisions, and processes affecting food and livelihood security of climate-vulnerable communities in the Lake Victoria border region.
- Work package 2 (WP2) focuses on the local implementation of and state-community encounters over policies affecting food and livelihood security. Tracing implementation of initiatives and policies relevant to food security at the local level, this work package aims at understanding the implementation processes, the nature of state-community encounters and the effects of local government autonomy and capacity to address food and livelihood security of climate vulnerable communities.
- Work package 3 (WP3) focuses on climate vulnerable communities' lived experiences and perceptions of food and livelihood security and local food system governance in the Lake Victoria region. This aims at advancing our in-depth understanding of how climate vulnerable communities perceive and experience food system challenges on the ground, and how they experience and the role they play in local food system governance.

The figure below illustrates the focus of the three work packages (WP):

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC POLITICAL SETTLEMENT

