

Climate Change and the Dynamics of Local Discourse in Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania

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This summer I embarked on a new research project as part of a large NSF-funded project on Local Knowledge and Climate Change Adaptation Project (LKCCAP) led by Dr. Thomas Smucker (Ohio University) and Prof. Pak Munishi (Sokoine University of Agriculture). Concentrating on Kilimanjaro region, Tanzania, the study seeks to explore the dynamics of local knowledge within the climate change adaptation project particularly as it relates to such aspects as interdependence, inequality, and local institutional settings. In this regard, my main responsibility is to explore how such dynamics manifest in the local discourse. I and the other team members spent May and June in the field, during which we were able to conduct household survey in four districts: Same, Mwanga, Rombo, and Moshi Rural from which Mwanga was selected as a site for detailed qualitative work scheduled for 2011 through 2012.

Although local knowledge is not exclusively a verbalized phenomenon, a significant portion of it manifests well in the day-to-day discourse.

Of particular interest in the case of Tanzania is the interaction between local (ethnic) languages (in which a significant portion of indigenous knowledge is embedded), a national language, Kiswahili (the major medium of formal national discourse) and the global discourse, which is partially dominated by English medium. Since climate and its related changes are considered as an environmental universal, I am interested in observing the flow of climate change discourse from the global level through the national level to the local setting and the linguistic forms that are adopted (linguistic change) in



the process presumably reflecting the dynamics of local knowledge.

Preliminary observations already indicate some interesting phenomena regarding the concept of ‘climate change’ itself. In order to capture the globally conceptualized climate change, climate change experts use the term “*mabadiliko ya tabianchi*” in Swahili-medium discourse in order to distinguish it from “*mabadiliko ya hali ya bewa*” which translates as “weather change.” But in the village-level discourse, not being aware of “*tabianchi*,” the *wananchi* (the masses) still cling to “*hali ya bewa*” (literally, the condition of the air) to refer to both “climate” and “weather”. To the villagers, the distinction between the

two seems less important as is the topocultural setting. While geographers would privilege a three-zoning segmentation (i.e., high, middle, and low), locals privilege a two-zoning system (i.e., ‘*mlimani*’ and ‘*tambarare*’ literally translated highland and lowland respectively). I anticipate that the results of this study will demonstrate the importance of local discourse within a broader agenda of local knowledge and climate change adaptation.

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