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Tanzania's new president provides a chance to revitalise climate policy

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The sudden death of President John Pombe Magufuli has left Tanzania in shock. He had pursued policies transforming Tanzania into a middle-income country but relegated climate policy to the sidelines. His vision can only be achieved, argues LSE's Timo Leiter, if his successor puts Tanzania on a climate-resilient development pathway.

On 17 March 2021, Tanzania's Vice President, Samia Suluhu Hassan, announced that President John Pombe Magufuli had died unexpectedly of heart failure. It has been **widely speculated** that President Magufuli's death may have been caused by COVID-19, a virus whose dangers he denied.

During his presidency, Magufuli pursued an ambitious economic reform agenda but showed no interest in advancing the climate policy work that his predecessor had begun. Despite climate impacts taking an increasing toll on people's

livelihoods and critical infrastructure in the country, climate change was dropped from the President's priority list. Tanzania subsequently fell behind its neighbours in preparing for climate change while simultaneously promoting a fossil fuel-heavy development pathway which further contributes to rising global greenhouse gas emissions.

At the time of his death, President Magufuli was just beginning his second five-year presidential term. During his first term he had gained praise for fighting corruption and pursuing major development projects, including a new railroad between Dar es Salaam and the capital Dodoma, a new airport terminal and a revitalised national airline. Magufuli was widely regarded by the Tanzanian population as a strong man who got things done, but he had also been attracting increasing criticism for his autocratic decision-making, crackdowns on the opposition (documented in the 2019 [Human Rights Report](#)) and restrictions on free press including a [change of the national statistics law](#) that made it an offence to contradict government statistics.

While industrialisation was at the heart of Magufuli's political agenda, the great majority of the population remains dependent on climate-sensitive sectors. Agriculture alone accounts for more than [65% of the workforce](#). Despite that, Magufuli never mentioned climate change in any public statement. The absence of leadership on this topic had its consequences. Tanzania was among the last countries that ratified the Paris Agreement, doing so only once more than 170 countries had already ([UN Treaty Collection](#)). Neighbouring countries Kenya, [Rwanda](#) and Uganda are far advanced in their climate policies and all three have adopted a national climate change law (see the [Grantham Research Institute's Climate Laws database](#)).

Magufuli instead embraced fossil-intensive development. Among the nine flagship projects in Tanzania's [National Development Plan 2017-21](#) is the construction of a coal-fired power plant, a liquefied natural gas terminal and a [large crude oil pipeline](#) from Uganda to the coast of Tanzania. These investments would further lock-in fossil fuel emissions for decades to come. In fact, all five scenarios of the Power Sector Master Plan from 2016 foresee 75-85% power generation from fossil fuels up to 2040 and a negligible role for renewables other than hydro power.

Investment and a suitable legal and policy environment are required to ramp up renewables

With its large area of almost 1 million square kilometres, a sun-rich location just South of the equator and over 1,000 kilometres of coastline, Tanzania has an abundant potential to meet its growing energy demand from renewable sources and become self-sufficient in energy supply. In fact, a **feasibility study** in 2017 by the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) concluded that '100 per cent renewable energy for all Tanzanians is technically and economically possible and a realistic pathway for Tanzania to align with the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals'.

Civil society organisations have tried to lobby the government to be more open to clean energy, but to no avail. On the contrary, the government rejected the continuation of an energy programme that aimed to advance 'affordable, reliable and sustainable energy', despite already approved funding of over €10m from Germany and the European Union (the **programme** subsequently ended in 2018).

Scaling-up clean energy in Tanzania requires large investments. The ISF's **feasibility study** estimates the total costs, taking into account a growing energy demand and large population growth, at US\$160–310bn and an additional US\$5–9bn per year for 'replacement after the economic lifetime of the plants'. The ISF study also finds that the shift to renewables would be economically favourable compared with a continued fossil-fuel-based scenario.

Yet, according to a **recent study** by the Climate Action Network Tanzania, the current legal and policy framework of the energy sector does not provide a suitable enabling environment for such investments. Another **study from 2019** similarly identified institutional, financial and technological barriers to large-scale solar power in Tanzania. Indeed, the investment climate for international investors **markedly decreased** during Magufuli's term. Moreover, many donors were turned away by Magufuli's anti-donor stance, which included the **forced departure of the EU Ambassador** in 2018 over his critical remarks on the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

For all the criticism of Magufuli, he genuinely wanted Tanzania's economy to grow and people to live better lives. However, achieving this vision will not be possible as long as the impacts of climate change on development remain unaddressed. Its adverse effects are already clearly felt by citizens across the country. In 2019, **heavy rainfall** destroyed more than 1,500 residences on the mainland and 2,000 houses on Zanzibar. These negative impacts will grow as the climate continues to heat up. Projections from the **Grantham Research Institute** strongly indicate additional rainfall intensity and a higher likelihood of dry spells. Recordings from **Tanzania's Meteorological Authority** confirm that 2019 has been both the fourth warmest and the fourth wettest year on record since 1970.

President Hassan must seize the opportunity for climate-resilient development

In accordance with the constitution, Vice President Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as new President of Tanzania on 19 March 2021, becoming the first female head of state in East Africa. She will need to deal not only with the COVID-19 pandemic but also with preparing the country for climate risks that likely exceed the coping range of large parts of its population. In her former role as Vice President she oversaw the climate portfolio and the Minister for the Environment directly reported to her. In 2020, she gave a **speech** on the occasion of the International Ozone Day and called on development partners to continue supporting Tanzania on environmental protection and adaptation and resilience to climate change. Samia Hassan, who is from Zanzibar, will have also noticed the severe impacts that extreme weather events, saltwater intrusion and beach erosion have on the island.

President Hassan has the opportunity to fulfil Magufuli's vision by combining economic growth with a climate-resilient development pathway. She can move Tanzania from a laggard to a front-runner on climate action. The absence of top-level leadership on climate change has been among the main barriers to date, as **interviews with key informants** from Tanzania's public and private sector have confirmed. Timing is critical and the updated Nationally Determined Contribution that Tanzania is due to submit to the United Nations Climate Change Secretariat

before the COP26 summit in November 2021 presents a first opportunity. International climate funds such the Green Climate Fund and other development partners stand ready to collaborate with the new president on this journey. If left unaddressed, climate change will further set back development gains and impact the most on those whose livelihoods Magufuli had promised to improve.

This blog was **first published** by the LSE Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment.

Photo: 'Tea plantations in Tanzania'. Workshops in villages in Tanzania in September and October 2017 brought local villagers together to discuss inclusive agriculture. Credit: Nkumi Mtingwa/CIFOR. Licensed under creative commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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