

Adaptation in International Climate Negotiations

Climate change has now become unavoidable; the impacts are already occurring in many parts of the world and are predicted to become more damaging and increasingly widespread. The worst impacts are being felt by those in developing countries who are the most reliant on their climate and ecosystems, are the most susceptible and ill-equipped to deal with extreme weather events, and who are already living in poverty. Furthermore, the extent of climate change that the world is currently locked into is already setting back development and compounding the poverty of those living in the least developed countries, small island developing states, and African countries prone to drought, desertification and flooding.

If people living in these countries are to cope – and in some cases, survive – they will have to adapt. Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), countries are negotiating how to respond to the problems of climate change, with particular focus on those vulnerable to the impacts, although not with the urgency or at the scale demanded by the most recent climate science. As a development organisation working to help people out of poverty, Practical Action advocates for the most fair and ambitious climate deal from this process, which will both secure the possibility of development for the communities in similar situations to the ones we work with, and allow adaptation to remain a feasible option.

How can a global climate deal support adaptation?

In the UN international negotiations, adaptation is given as much importance as mitigation, together with the finance and technology needed to deliver both. However, the 200 nations attending the Copenhagen climate change conference at the end of 2009, failed to agree on a new and adequate global system for dealing with climate change after the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012, as required.

The negotiations are continuing throughout 2010 and beyond, yet it is still unclear when an agreement will be reached. This delay is risky. We are approaching important deadlines for halting the growth of emissions, if we are not to see disastrous climate change which will make adaptation in many parts of the world impossible by 2100, and potentially as early as 2050. The elements that Practical Action believes are essential in a new climate system are:

- A commitment to sufficiently strong mitigation targets to hold global average surface temperatures to less than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

Not agreeing on these targets is the most dangerous consequence from the delay in the negotiations, as the most current science states that emissions need to peak and start to decline by 2015. The further temperatures rise, the more difficult adaptation becomes.
- Commitment to financial mechanisms for the generation of **sufficient, predictable** and **sustainable** funding for adaptation (estimated as at least **\$200bn** over the period 2013-2017), and institutions for the governance of the funding to have a majority representation of developing countries.

At Copenhagen, developed countries agreed to supply \$100bn annually by 2020 but it is

currently unclear how this finance will be raised or disbursed.

- This funding should come from developed countries, as the main contributors to climate change. It should be additional to the Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments (namely 0.7% of GDP) of developed nations, and be delivered as grants not loans.
- Procedures to ensure that developing countries, and local communities within them, have access to **technology** that can assist adaptation. This includes the development of new technologies and effective ways to share information about existing, relevant technologies between countries, communities and civil society organisations.
- Immediate funding for the least developed countries to implement their National Adaptation Programmes of Action through simplified application mechanisms under the guidance of the UNFCCC. Since Copenhagen, some countries' contributions to the fast-start finance (to be allocated before 2013) has included contributions to the LDC Fund for NAPA implementation, but this finance comes from existing ODA budgets.

If support (finance, technology and capacity building) is to help those who are most in need within developing countries, Practical Action believes any agreement on adaptation must be based on the following four principles:

Ensuring equity and reaching the most vulnerable

Adaptation support must prioritise the needs of and ensure that resources reach the most vulnerable, on whom climate change is having a disproportional impact. These include marginalised groups, women and children, indigenous peoples, and local communities. All adaptation support should also respect, protect and promote human rights.

All-stakeholder involvement

To provide appropriate support where and to whom it is most needed, adaptation planning and implementation should include the widest range of stakeholders. National, sub-national and community level ownership over adaptation planning and implementation, and the disbursement of adaptation finance, is crucial.

From the community level, the representation of key stakeholders – especially vulnerable

communities, marginalised groups, women, and indigenous peoples – should be ensured at every stage of the adaptation process. The existing knowledge, experience and priorities of communities are central inputs to successful adaptation; responses to climate change should be demand led: based on the local assessment of risks, needs and circumstances.

National governments frame many of the policies, and potentially will be the providers of many of the services and information needed for adaptation. They will be the main recipients of any adaptation finance to come from an international climate deal. All levels of government should, therefore, be open and responsive to the community and marginalised voices at all stages of decision-making. The planning and implementation of adaptation provisions must be done in a transparent and well documented way that is open to public scrutiny.

Integrated approach

Adaptation is not an issue that can be treated in isolation. The effects of climate change impact on many areas of people's lives and addressing those impacts requires a holistic approach. Adaptation should be integrated at all levels of development work, poverty reduction, disaster risk reduction and natural resource management. At a national level, adaptation should not be seen as only a problem for environment ministries, but understood as requiring a coherent approach across all departments.

Reducing vulnerability, building adaptive capacity and increasing resilience

The exact nature of future climate change is impossible to determine because of the inherent uncertainty in climate predictions. Nevertheless, the absence of complete information should not be a reason to postpone or scale down action: poor communities will continue to bear the brunt of climate change and must be enabled to live and develop in the face of uncertainty.

Because climate change could turn out differently from expectations, there is a risk of mal-adaptation, in which projects or programmes tailored to a particular climate future become irrelevant or damaging to the community. Rather than focusing solely on a particular climate change threat, adaptation should address the ongoing causes of vulnerability to climate change. Dealing with an uncertain future requires resilience (to ride out unexpected events) and adaptive capacity (enabling communities to make lifestyles and livelihoods changes in response to emerging climate change).