

# Adaptation to Climate Change: Securing Survival of the Poorest

The impacts of climate change on people's lives are already devastating. They range from storms, floods, droughts, sickness, shifting seasons to desertification and rising sea levels. For poor people in developing countries who are already living on the margins, a small increase in climate risk can have catastrophic consequences. And even the most ambitious global efforts to curb emissions under a Copenhagen agreement will only limit, not avoid, global warming and its human cost. Even if it is kept below 2°C, many societies will face serious damages and long-lasting impacts that can send people into a downward spiral of increasing poverty and vulnerability.

## What is adaptation?

Developing countries, least responsible for the changing climate, are hit first and hardest. They are particularly vulnerable because of widespread poverty and a lack of resources or social protection systems to help people recover from climate shocks or sustain their livelihoods. Building resilience and reducing people's vulnerability is crucial to protect people against the worsening impacts of climate change.

Making development activities climate resilient could include measures such as working with agricultural communities to select or develop drought-tolerant or flood-tolerant crop varieties, introducing new irrigation and rainwater-harvesting techniques in regions with reduced rainfall, early warning systems to reduce risk and damage from climate related disasters such as floods or tropical cyclones, but also building higher roads and bridges or new regulations for hurricane-resilient buildings. Social protection systems can help people recover from shocks, as can climate-indexed insurance systems that, for example, trigger payouts to smallholder farmers when rainfall drops below certain levels and damages their crops.

Building resilience and reducing people's vulnerability will lower climate related risks and impacts but will not make people immune against high impact disasters. There are limits to adaptation – even a newly constructed seawall may not help against flooding when extremely heavy tropical storms hit land and rising sea-levels will make many small islands completely uninhabitable.

## The basics in the Copenhagen agreement

*“Rain is so unpredictable these days. My crops are now dry. I used up all my seeds when planting. Now I have nothing. I have mixed different crops as I am not sure which will survive the weather. I have beans, maize, and cassava but still they dry up. The rain has deserted us.” Chrisellia Nzabonimpa, farmer and community leader, Nyagatare District, Rwanda*

The Bali Action Plan, which is the mandate for the negotiations on a new climate deal by the Copenhagen UN Climate Conference, lists “enhanced action on adaptation” and “improved access to new and additional financial resources” as building blocks of the new agreement. In fact, for many of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries, these provisions are essential – without them they would have to reject the agreement as unacceptable. Oxfam is calling for the Copenhagen agreement to include an **Adaptation Action Framework** that is built around the following elements. All these measures are found in the current draft texts of the Copenhagen agreement, but many of them are fiercely opposed by rich countries:

- **Regular and binding financial support, in the form of grants, not loans.** Oxfam says it should start with at least \$50 billion per year in 2013, and be raised to at least \$100 billion per year in 2020. These funds need to be binding and come on top of rich countries' existing commitment to deliver 0.7% of their national income as development aid. This financial support should be disbursed through a new **global climate finance mechanism**, ensuring that all developing countries can access and the most vulnerable countries have priority. Disbursement in-country should take place through, for example, national implementing entities or trust funds.

- **The money should be made available for all adaptation actions and programmes needed, including capacity building, generation and gathering of data and knowledge as well as risks and vulnerability assessments.** Action in countries should focus on the needs of the most vulnerable people and communities; be driven by local needs and priorities; and involve all relevant stakeholders. Identifying and prioritising adaptation needs and actions as well as taking decisions over funding allocation should be a country-driven process, and thus be a clear break from the current model of donor-led international aid finance.
- A **global knowledge and capacity building hub** for sharing, gathering and exchanging data, knowledge and experiences; and improve transparency and participation in adaptation planning and implementation. To this end, regional adaptation centres and networks should be set up or strengthened.
- An international **climate risk insurance facility** that provides technical assistance to help reduce and manage climate related risks and support pro-poor insurance schemes such as micro-insurance.
- **Provisions to address loss and damage from unavoidable impacts** of climate change should kick in when adaptation is not possible or where impacts exceed adaptive capacity. These provisions should aim to recover and rehabilitate livelihoods threatened, damaged or lost through climate impacts. One way or another, countries and communities will need coherent international responses when their lands and livelihoods become untenable.
- A **Work Programme on Near-Term Action on Adaptation**. Since the Copenhagen agreement is not likely to enter into force before 2013, a special international work programme on action 2010-2012 should **fast-track urgent adaptation actions in the most vulnerable countries**, build capacity and help prepare developing countries for the substantially larger investments on adaptation needed in the future (“prime the system”).

## The battle lines: is adaptation finance truly new and additional?

*“Assistance for climate change should not be allowed to divert money from the pledges we have already made to the poorest.” Gordon Brown, UK Prime Minister*

Poor countries have indicated that when planning and implementing adaptation, including when disbursing international public finance to support adaptation, they want a clear shift away from the current donor led model of international aid finance. They argue that supporting adaptation is not an act of charity but a responsibility by rich countries resulting from their role in causing the climate crisis. Developing countries have also argued that adaptation finance should flow through a central funding mechanism under the authority of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to increase accountability and measurability of finance provided by developed countries. They also want to move away from what they see as an ineffective system of existing bilateral and multilateral institutions that all have their own conditionalities and rules to access finance, and make developing countries dependent on donor countries own political or economic priorities.

Developing countries have also asked for recognition that there are limits to adaptation. Despite best efforts to adapt and reduce risks, there will be substantial loss and damage from unavoidable impacts of climate change. Small island states, whose very existence is at risk, are leading calls for a mechanism to compensate countries when lands and livelihoods become untenable. Rich countries are fiercely opposing any such moves, and up until the last round of UN negotiations in November several rich countries have tried to kick the entire issue off the agenda.

Rich countries agree that there is an urgent need for enhanced action on adaptation, but they see adaptation as development in a hostile climate. They argue that, rather than providing new and additional resources, the additional costs of adaptation should be covered future aid budgets. They also believe that the current system of bi- and multilateral co-operation mechanisms – such as funds under the World Bank that are controlled by donors – is sufficient to deliver the support they plan to provide.

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