

ADVANCING CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION THROUGH GREATER COLLECTIVE ACTIONS



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Climate change is a global process, but it has serious and devastating local impacts that are felt unevenly across the world. The poor in developing countries, who are likely to suffer the most from the effects of climate change, have over many generations developed coping strategies to deal with natural disasters and variability in weather and climate. But these strategies are not likely to be effective in dealing with the devastating long-term impacts of climate change. Vulnerable communities now need more planned and informed adaptation strategies to protect their lives, livelihoods, wealth, and well-being from climatic disasters. Scientists, policy and decision makers, and development partners must work together to understand adaptation needs and develop appropriate and effective approaches for advancing community, local, regional, and sectoral adaptations.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has provided the moral, ethical, and scientific basis—as well as structure—for advancing adaptation. The convention urges all the parties to cooperate in preparation for adaptation to impacts of climate change and develop appropriate and integrated plans for coastal zone management, water resources, and agriculture, as well as to minimize adverse effects of climate change on economic growth, public health, and environmental quality. It calls for urgent actions and resources from developed countries to assist the developing country parties that are vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

Progress and Barriers to Adaptation. The 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report identified a number of

barriers to adaptation, including physical and ecological barriers; financial, institutional, and technological barriers; and information and cognitive barriers.

To address some of these limitations, we must build greater awareness among vulnerable communities about climate change, as well as harmonize data and information about climate change and its impacts. The UNFCCC supports information exchange and awareness building, but this has not been adequately put into practice in sufficient scale. With the support of the World Bank, UN agencies, and others, local governments and competent NGOs should be engaged in awareness and capacity building initiatives. It would be appropriate to incorporate this into a broader framework of disaster risk reduction.

As for technology and resource mobilization, an inventory of adaptation technology—including indigenous practices and eco-specific interventions—could be adapted and modified to address climate change impacts at the local and regional scales. Developed countries and institutions must provide support for a technology inventory and innovation for adaptation and disaster risk reduction in the developing world. Efforts must be made to ensure the transfer of these technologies and to monitor the appropriateness, efficacy, social acceptance, market access, and replicability of these technologies and practices. The World Bank can play a key role in initiating and furthering this process in collaboration with appropriate research, policy, and extension organizations.

UNFCCC Efforts on the Adaptation Front. The UNFCCC's Nairobi Work Programme (NWP) on impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation to climate change aims to assist countries—particularly developing countries, including the least-developed countries and small-island states—to improve their understanding and actions in relation to impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation. The NWP is structured around nine areas of work, focusing mainly on assessment, capacity building, and informed decision making through research, development of approaches, planning, and advocacy.

The NWP offers a significant opportunity for advancing these concepts to the planning stage. To ensure a significant number of activities on the ground, we must build local adaptation capacity. The tools developed in NWP can be utilized, but they must be sensitive to the practices that communities have developed through their own knowledge systems and cultural sensitivity. Research and implementing organizations, preferably from the South, could be used as intermediaries for hastening the process of innovative adaptation projects and programs.

Linking Mitigation and Adaptation. The UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, and NWP have suggested simultaneous actions by various actors on mitigation, adaptation, and technology innovation. Many scientists feel that mitigation is the best form of adaptation. Mitigation measures—such as measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and to adopt a low-carbon development path—implemented now will reduce climate impacts and adaptation costs in future. Though mitigation has been stumbling somewhat, there has been some progress in adaptation efforts, particularly in the developing countries. Many developing countries recognize that adaptation has a direct and reinforcing relationship with poverty, food security and health, livelihood promotion of the poor, disaster risk, and sustainable development.

Helping Least-Developed Countries Adapt. Many of the least-developed countries have formulated National Adaptation Plans of Action, or NAPAs. The Global Environment Facility has supported the formulation of NAPAs, but developing countries need resources and technology from developed countries and multilateral and bilateral development agencies like the World Bank to implement the adaptation activities identified in NAPAs.

The development of NAPAs also could be improved in various ways. For example, they should adopt a holistic and livelihood approach instead of a sectoral approach. The NAPA process, in both planning and implementation, should ensure the integration of indigenous

knowledge and practices in advancing adaptation. Finally, NAPA activities should consider short-, medium-, and long-term climatic variability and impacts. Measures to help the poorest sectors of society should be the first priority.

Involving NGOs and Communities. The Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS), an independent research and policy institute in Dhaka, has a strong interest in understanding adaptation needs and approaches. BCAS also seeks to promote climate change adaptation with various stakeholders and actors, including governments, development agencies, and communities. In association with the International Institute for Environment and Development and development partners, BCAS organized an international Community-Based Adaptation (CBA) Workshop in Dhaka in 2007 to enhance understanding among scientists and practitioners about approaches to adaptation and the integration of adaptation into sustainable development. Working with partners under the South-South-North initiative, BCAS is also advancing community adaptation projects in drought- and salinity-affected areas of Bangladesh. Project activities may include both adaptation and mitigation measures, such as irrigation with solar energy, afforestation, water security, and livelihood promotion.

A Greater Need for Partnerships. Southern NGOs can play a key role in mainstreaming adaptation in development such as through disaster risk reduction and other approaches, as well as assist in achieving MDGs such as promoting water and sanitation, poverty reduction, and enhancing nutrition for the poor. An interesting example is a gradual change in the profile of adaptation activities in Bangladesh. A Climate Development Forum has been formed in which leading climate organizations are working closely with leading development agencies. This process is generating a gradual mainstreaming of climate adaptation in the development process, but it is only a beginning.

Greater Equity and Collective Action. Climate change will increase inequity and social conflict in the coming decades if we don't take urgent actions now before it goes beyond our control. The southern and developing countries have very little capacity—both economically and politically—to influence global decision making. The UN Conference of Parties and related global decision-making processes must create greater scope and structure for effective participation and contribution from the South to reverse current practices. To build a better and just world, we have to ensure equity and justice in mitigation, adaptation, technology generation and transfer, and resource allocation to save the planet, people, and ecosystems from the emerging danger of climate change.