

ADAPTING TO DISASTERS? GLOBAL DEAL MUST DELIVER TO SAVE LIVES

Rich countries – which have done most to cause climate change – must now provide funding to help people who are already suffering from its effects, helping them respond to the risks and plan for the future.

In December 2009, governments will convene in Copenhagen, Denmark, to negotiate a global agreement on climate change. But negotiations will stall if rich nations do not agree to take responsibility and pay for the effects of climate change that poor countries experience today.

Climate change already has a severe impact on countries and people who have done the least to contribute to it; they are now the ones suffering most. The impact of climate change threatens to push more and more people into poverty.

The threat is two-fold. The already fragile basis of many people's incomes is further eroded, making them more vulnerable to external shocks. And they face increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather events, such as storms, floods and droughts.

Therefore, a fair and effective climate agreement must include substantial and efficiently delivered funding that helps people respond to current climate risks

and prepare for future climate change. This would enable them to choose where and how they want to live, now and in the future.

Scale up support substantially

The agreement must show a firm global commitment to compensating and supporting those countries and people who suffer the consequences of climate change. All parties must ensure that as a result of the negotiations, those affected are able to protect their lives and their livelihoods, and more importantly, to develop according to their priorities and choices.

Rich nations must therefore first deliver on previous commitments. Developing countries are already struggling to reduce poverty and ensure basic food security. Their priorities in adapting to climate-change will be dictated by this struggle and their need to develop. There is considerable concern that the climate change agenda will be abused by rich countries to renege on existing and yet unfulfilled commitments to poverty alleviation. Rich countries

Compensation should be made available immediately. This is crucial to address the lack of trust between industrialised and developing nations

What the deal must deliver to save lives

- **Substantially scale up support to address climate change impacts:** rich nations must adequately compensate developing countries for their losses incurred now, and cover the costs to adapt for the future.
- **Ensure that adaptation support is part of current and future development efforts:** this is not about choice – people suffer poverty, hunger and disasters now; adaptation will need to address current

concerns to build future resilience.

- **Immediate and future support must reach those who are most vulnerable:** poor people shoulder the main burden of climate change. As impacts are felt most strongly by local communities, solutions will have to be sought at the local level.
- **Focus on reducing risk:** a culture of prevention must be developed that creates real incentives for building the resilience of people and penalises development investments that leave people vulnerable and exposed to climate risk.

Current and future climate risks are eroding already fragile economies and threatening the survival of vulnerable populations.

must show they are serious by meeting their current commitments on aid and on adaptation under existing agreements.¹

Second, they must agree on legally binding and additional compensation for climate change impacts experienced by developing countries now and in the future. This compensation must be made available to affected countries and people in a direct, transparent and accountable manner.

Compensation should be made available immediately. This is crucial to address the lack of trust between industrialised and developing nations. Christian Aid with its Aprove partners and through Climate Action Network (CAN) International has put forward concrete suggestions on how to deliver these funds in an accountable and equitable manner.²

Ensure that adaptation support is part of current and future development efforts

Current and future climate risks are eroding already fragile economies and threatening the survival of vulnerable populations. Existing poverty is exacerbated by severe economic and human losses caused by disasters.

During the last two decades, 76 per cent of all disaster events were weather- and climate- related. They accounted for approximately 45 per cent of the deaths and 80 per cent of the economic losses caused by natural hazards. More importantly, the number of small and localised disasters is on the increase and some 92 per cent of these local events are weather-related.³ Climate change is expected to increase the number and scale of such events, and to make people more vulnerable to them by destroying their sources of income and reducing development opportunities.

And it is not only the immediate losses caused by disasters that will need to be addressed. Disasters undo decades of

development efforts and reverse gains in poverty reduction. Recent estimates calculate that 15 to 60 per cent of aid flows are affected by climate change.⁴ Private investments are at an even greater risk. Actions that simultaneously reduce poverty, address disaster risk, and consider current and future climate variations therefore prove to be the best options.

The agreement should recognise that **we cannot choose between adaptation, poverty reduction and disaster risk reduction**. Tackling poverty and reducing people's vulnerability to extreme weather events increases their chances to survive and adapt to climate change.

The recent report of the Commission on Climate Change and Development highlights that in fact, most local adaptation work will need to be 'doing more of the same' but with an improved understanding of risks and the multiplying effect that climate change has on these risks.⁵ Similarly, the Bali Action Plan, agreed by governments two years ago, highlights the mutual benefits of risk reduction and adaptation, and calls for effective disaster risk management.

Adaptation funding therefore must be made available for immediate poverty and risk-reduction activities, including sustainable land-use planning, establishing building codes and standards, local risk assessments, effective early warning systems, the protection of environmental resources and ecosystems, and raising public awareness of climate risk.

Immediate and future support must reach those who are most vulnerable

As the impact of climate change is felt most severely by local communities in low-income countries, real progress in adaptation can only be made at the local level. Therefore, **access to adaptation**

'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure'

Ian Johnson, Commission on Climate Change and Development

Disaster risk-reduction is one of the most cost-effective ways to start developing the capacity of countries and people to manage climate risk. For example, because China spent US\$3.15bn on flood control between 1960 and 2000, it prevented losses of an estimated US\$12bn.

In Vietnam, mangrove-planting projects in coastal areas produced an even more

impressive result: the protection of coastal populations from typhoons and storms is estimated to have yielded a benefit/cost ratio of 52 between 1994 and 2001 alone. Recent studies by the IMF, World Bank and civil society organisations estimate that for every dollar spent on risk-reduction measures, two to four dollars are saved in response and rehabilitation.

Source: ISDR (2008) *Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction. Briefing Note*; and DFID (2009) www.dfid.gov.uk/Global-Issues/How-we-fight-Poverty/Humanitarian-Disasters/Disaster-risk-reduction-strategies/

funding must be direct, transparent and accountable. Funding targets should be established for local and community-based adaptation and disaster risk-reduction work, and tracking systems for disbursement and spending must be developed.

Years of efforts to reduce poverty and people's vulnerability to disasters teach us one clear lesson: communities are more successful in protecting their lives and developing their livelihoods when they work in close partnership with local governments and civil society.⁶ **Local partnerships ensure that resources and skills are pooled, optimising outcomes.** They also act as important catalysts for long-term change.

Such initiatives, however, are currently small in number and scale and need substantial additional investments. An agreement on adaptation funding should therefore include **clear principles and mechanisms for allocating resources to local levels.**

Christian Aid endorses the Adaptation Action Framework proposed by CAN International and its objective of providing 'easy and direct access to much-needed resources for governments and communities and people most vulnerable to climate change'⁷ The negotiating parties must **ensure that funding is channelled directly to those regions and communities most at risk, in ways that empower** local governments and enable them to draw on the skills of communities and civil society.

Focus on reducing climate risk

Rich and developing nations are hoping to effectively manage the risks of current climate events and future climate change. However, this will not be enough. The discussions and negotiations must make a radical shift – away from an overreliance on mechanisms for risk transfer and sharing, such as climate and disaster insurance, towards **building a culture of prevention.**

Insurance is not a panacea, particularly when lives are lost. Poor communities and those worst affected by climate change are not the ones to benefit most from such schemes. For them, reducing risks and protecting their livelihoods are the only hope for survival.

Funding for adaptation therefore needs to be available now for actions that reduce risks. Three areas of action are not only fundamental building blocks for disaster risk reduction but also viable first steps towards long-term adaptation: local and national climate risk assessments; early warning systems that integrate meteorological data and national response mechanisms with locally effective communication systems; and sector-specific risk reduction. In all areas, there are immediate and cost-effective measures that can be taken now.⁸

For poor communities, reducing risks and protecting their livelihoods are the only hope for survival

Put people at the centre of the deal

Christian Aid believes that the primary objective of an agreement on adaptation must be to build the resilience and adaptive ability of vulnerable communities. This can

Some advantages and disadvantages of climate insurance schemes

Advantages

- Predictable and reliable payouts allow for long-term development planning.
- Can protect sources of income and therefore lives in the long-term.
- Potential to increase government ownership.
- Can reduce the negative effects that relief operations may have on local markets and social equity.

Disadvantages

- Payment of premium potentially unsustainable for governments.
- Can only cover losses of previously existing assets, but no substitute for job creation or market access.
- Difficulties with targeting and participation, ie reaching poor communities and involving them in the design.
- Complexity of cost-benefit analysis means that economic argument cannot always be made.

Endnotes

- 1** These include the commitments of 0.7 per cent Overseas Development Aid and adaptation-related commitments under the Convention and the Bali Action Plan.
- 2** Aprovev (2009), The United Nations Climate Fund, and CAN International (2009) *An Adaptation Action Framework for the Copenhagen Agreement*.
- 3** ISDR, *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*, United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, 2009.
- 4** Agrawala, in K O'Brien et al, 2008, 'Disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and human security'. Report prepared for the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Global Environmental Change and Human Security (GECHS) Project, GECHS Report 2008:3.
- 5** Commission on Climate Change and Development, *Closing the Gaps, Final Report*. Stockholm, Sweden, 2009.
- 6** For empirical evidence see Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Risk Reduction, 'Views from the frontline: a local perspective of progress towards implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action', 2009.
- 7** CAN International, *An Adaptation Action Framework for the Copenhagen Agreement*, 2009.
- 8** For more detail see ISDR, *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*, United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, 2009.

only be done by supporting people-centred and cost-effective local action that reduces damage and losses within relatively short time frames, as well as building long-term development. The reduction of vulnerability and poverty and the prevention of recurrent disasters are the cornerstones for building future resilience.



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