

Defining a Future Research Agenda on Pro-Poor Adaptation

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The Institute of Development Studies (IDS), together with the London School of Economics (LSE), Tearfund, Christian Aid, University of Leeds, Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre, have established a research network on *poverty and adaptation*. The Network, funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), intends to apply different disciplinary perspectives on the theory and policy challenges of how to make climate change adaptation work for the world's poor. It also seeks to reposition the theory and discourse of climate change adaptation and in doing so recognise the importance of science and knowledge in promoting pro-poor adaptation. The following article draws on chapters in this *IDS Bulletin* as well as a series of short submissions from each of the seven Network members on 'pro-poor adaptation', which were presented at the Network's second meeting in May 2008. In doing so, it presents a series of questions and issues that contribute to a research agenda on pro-poor adaptation.

1 Delivering pro-poor adaptation

Applying a social justice and equity lens to climate change debates, and to pro-poor adaptation more specifically (see Polack, this *IDS Bulletin*), requires us to consider whether climate change adaptation and climate change-resilient development should be tasked with reducing relative levels of poverty in addition to absolute poverty (see Vernon, this *IDS Bulletin*). Consequently, defining 'pro-poor' in relative terms has implications for the way climate change interventions address vulnerability as well – therefore, the aim is not just to reduce absolute vulnerability of poor groups, but also to reduce the difference in vulnerability between the poor and the non-poor. Simply, the poor must suffer less from climate change than the rich. This raises questions about how adaptation to climate change might

involve the redistribution of assets and enable genuine reverses in inequality.

In turn, this demands analysis of effective delivery mechanisms for adaptation and whether the institutions currently charged with stewarding the international climate change regime, and the financing of climate change adaptation associated with it, are well-suited to delivering both relative poverty reduction and relative vulnerability reduction to the world's poorest groups. Nevertheless, the volume of adaptation financing and support needed to reduce such inequalities would indicate a shift away from project-based delivery to much wider and larger programmatic delivery of climate change adaptation – an opportunity then, to learn from the experiences of social protection and poverty reduction and to launch a substantial research programme on the social dimensions of climate change and on designing climate-resilient social protection that may bring reversals in inequality (see Davies *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*). Additionally, assuming a greatly increased flow of resources for climate change adaptation:

- How can these resources help to ensure climate change-resilient development across a range of government activities?
- How can these activities deliver relative reduction in poverty and climate change vulnerability among the poorest groups?
- How can activities help to give voice and power to marginalised groups?

2 Claiming climate justice, differentiating adaptation

To understand how to deliver relative reductions in climate change vulnerability, climate change adaptation projects and tools need to improve how

they differentiate and disaggregate age, gender, ethnicity and other social factors, as currently the voices of marginalised people are being silenced by methods and tools that aggregate people within their communities and that are blind to asymmetric power relations. This can be achieved by first, exploring the ways by which groups with weak voices can become empowered through forming coalitions and how these coalitions can forge effective accountability pathways. This should go hand-in-hand with research that assesses the implications that a rapidly changing climate has on dimensions of power. Improved knowledge of power and a commitment to foster empowerment will help poor groups to claim their rights and open new policy spaces. Consequently, additional analysis must focus on defining and operationalising rights to climate change adaptation and to development in a climate-constrained world. To what extent are these rights recognised in international environmental law and how do these transcend scales to local contexts?

Second, achieving relative reductions in poverty and vulnerability is dependent on adaptation interventions being tailored to different poor groups. For example, Tanner and Mitchell (this *IDS Bulletin*) suggest that microfinance and microinsurance may only be appropriate adaptation measures for the transient and non-poor but less appropriate for the chronically poor, who have few assets and limited agency – a view supported by both Hammill *et al.* and Pierro and Desai (this *IDS Bulletin*). Together with the recognition that adaptation options also need to be tailored to marginalised groups (by age, gender and other social factors), this adds a layer of complexity. Furthermore, if adaptation measures need to be differentiated by livelihood type and asset mix too, they become distributed across three dimensions.

Understanding how different poor groups cope with and adapt to climate change-related shocks and stresses over extended periods of time will help to clarify the nature of the adaptation decisions and measures across the three-dimensional categories detailed above. Accordingly, drawing on research methods for studying chronic poverty, a condition signified by its persistence over time and its transmission between generations, is crucial. These methods include combining panel data and life histories at the household and sub-household scale to form longitudinal studies of poverty, techniques that should also be applied to assess how and why

people take different climate change adaptation decisions. For adaptation, this means transferring the unit of analysis away from the community to the household level and taking a longitudinal research perspective – avoiding the temptation of delivering short-term adaptation projects that only consider adaptation progress in a snap-shot (see Yamin *et al.* 2005). One way to encourage this approach is for climate change adaptation evaluation frameworks to assume an equal focus on progress towards poverty reduction or Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets alongside ecosystem-based or asset-focused adaptation metrics (see Hedger *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*). A second way is to develop research on how and why poverty and vulnerability to climate change is passed between generations (intergenerational transfer). This compels a longer-term, forward-looking perspective on the success of adaptation interventions for current and future generations (see Prowse and Scott, this *IDS Bulletin*).

3 Linking adaptation to growth

It is also important to learn from those with experience of pro-poor growth, who would suggest that growth and adaptation to climate change go hand-in-hand. For example, this may be achieved (1) by promoting growth through the diversification or intensification of economic activity across time and space (see Sabates-Wheeler *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*); (2) by investing in health, education and housing (as soft climate change insurance); (3) by improving the access of poor groups to local services and (4) by pooling and transferring disaster risks (see Pierro and Desai, this *IDS Bulletin*). The challenge is securing economic growth that is simultaneously low carbon and climate change resilient, though accepting that the poorest countries still retain the right to increase their levels of pollution based on the Greenhouse Development Rights framework set out by Baer *et al.* (2007). For many countries that have high levels of poverty, but limited greenhouse development rights, a pro-poor adaptation agenda leads us to consider how low carbon, climate-resilient economic growth can also reduce relative and absolute poverty. This issue has yet to be explored in depth, especially the adaptation/poverty-related trade-offs emerging from the tensions between environmental sustainability and economic growth.

4 Pro-poor climate change adaptation governance

While growth brings poverty benefits and climate change brings opportunities as well as threats, the

chronically and transient poor can easily be left behind and are ill-equipped to take advantage of improving conditions (Kates 2000). It is the responsibility of the state and civil society organisations to ensure different poor groups have the skills, knowledge and capital to find pathways out of poverty and to reduce their vulnerability to climate change when conditions are favourable. However, limited research has been conducted on which configurations of institutions and legislation at a national, provincial and local scale are best suited to delivering climate change-resilient development? Additionally, are these configurations different when focused on delivering development-sensitive climate change adaptation projects, where the impacts of climate change are already being felt and how can a pro-poor climate governance dimension be secured more broadly? Learning from and influencing existing sectoral governance arrangements (e.g. agriculture, water, energy), along with institutions designed to manage financial, disaster and health risks appears a sensible approach, although the pro-poor dimensions of any such arrangements must also be interrogated.

While existing institutional and legislative arrangements may need to evolve to enable people to cope with and adapt to climate change, there should be recognition of how climate change exposes weaknesses in governance structures and may require completely new governance configurations. While market forces will help to create a degree of autonomous adaptation for those with access to markets, governments will need to address market failures and support those delinked or without access to markets – this is the moral imperative of the international community given the unequal burden of climate change risks on developing countries and on poor and vulnerable groups. So should governments assume this role themselves or regulate the private and charitable sectors to do so? Social safety nets,

sponsored national climate change insurance schemes, support to migrants and their households, national and provincial economic diversification plans and investments in improved climate change science are activities that might be employed under such conditions.

Crucially, for pro-poor adaptation, developing country governments must negotiate a post-2012 climate change agreement that minimises the need for adaptation in poor countries and maximises the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in rich ones. Only by securing a stabilisation target that places the most responsibility to act with the historically biggest polluters, will the burden of risk be shifted away from poor and vulnerable groups. While developing country governments must secure a suitable redistribution of assets to allow poor and vulnerable groups to successfully adapt to current and future climate change (over the next 30–40 years), placing undue emphasis on securing a good deal on adaptation, rather than on mitigation, will be an injustice to the disadvantaged groups they are representing. Simply, the closer these groups are pushed towards the limits of adaptation, the less chance they have of escaping poverty. Keeping poor and vulnerable people away from these limits requires an improved understanding of how different adaptation–mitigation stabilisation scenarios increase or decrease risks for poor and vulnerable people and distribute the burden of responsibility for adaptation. Given the pace of international climate change negotiations and the speed at which the climate is changing, there is much to do and little time in which to do it. Without doubt, climate change is one of the foremost challenges to development and it will take a collective effort of a magnitude yet unseen if we are going to escape a significant reversal of the development progress made in previous decades.

References

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