

Why Should Development NGOs worry about Climate Change?

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Firstly let me thank the organisers for kindly inviting me to address this Round Table of the major development NGOs in Ireland. It is a pleasure to be here. I have been asked to address the question: *Why development NGOs should start to take the issue of climate change seriously?*

I propose to do this by first giving some information on how the climate change debate has evolved over time (this is very much a personal view and not everyone might agree with it). I will then suggest why the time is now ripe for the development community in general, and the development NGOs in particular, to start to engage with the climate change issue and describe some ways in which this is already being done and finally suggest some possible ways to carry it forward.

The evolution of the climate change discourse in science and global policy

The climate change issue came to global attention from the scientific community in the eighties with the publication of the first assessment report of the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*¹ published in 1990 which alerted the world to the fact that the current rate of emissions of greenhouse gases (mainly Carbon dioxide from burning of fossil fuels such as coal, petroleum and natural gas) if continued would result in major changes in the earth's atmospheric temperatures with

¹ The IPCC is an "intergovernmental" body consisting of all the member states of the UN and was set up under the joint auspices of two UN bodies, namely the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the eighties. It brings together hundreds of the world's leading scientists to carry out periodic reviews of the state of scientific knowledge about various aspects of climate change and is the world's most credible and authoritative voice of scientific knowledge on the subject.

potentially catastrophic consequences for both natural ecosystems and human systems on the planet.

This warning from the scientific community to the global policy making community led to the negotiations and signature of the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)*² in June of 1992 at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil by most of the world's countries. The Convention recognises the problem of human induced climate change and commits all its signatory countries to make efforts to reduce their emission of greenhouse gases.

In 1995 the IPCC issued its *second assessment report* in which it was reported that far from emissions of greenhouse gases being reduced they continued to rise and that such increase in emissions, if not reduced soon, would result in potentially catastrophic results around the planet. This in turn led the global policy making community to negotiate and agree the *Kyoto Protocol*³ at the third conference of parties (COP3) of the UNFCCC held in Kyoto, Japan in December 1997. It should be recalled that the United States of America (under the leadership of then-Vice President Al Gore who was in Kyoto) did negotiate and agree a target for the US at Kyoto, but the Clinton administration never placed it before the US Senate for ratification (as was required by the treaty) and then subsequently the Bush administration withdrew its support for the treaty altogether.

The *third assessment report* of the IPCC came out in 2001, and for the first time raised the issue of having to deal with the probable near-term impacts of climate change (known as “adaptation” in the climate change jargon) as well as the already-recognised need to reduce emissions (or “mitigation”). Thus the international policy response options for climate change now changed from what could be characterised as “prevention” of “dangerous” climate change through “mitigation” to one in which such prevention of dangerous climate change (at least for some ecosystems and communities) is no longer possible (because of the slow time-lags in the climatic system-whereby stopping emissions today will not result in any appreciable change in the climatic system for at least a decade and possibly two decades) and that such communities needed to be helped to “adapt” to the inevitable impacts. This resulted in the agreement of the “Marrakech Accords” at the seventh conference of parties (COP7) of the UNFCCC held in November 2001 in Marrakech, Morocco where a number of new funds were agreed to support the developing countries to adapt to climate change. These included:

- (i) *The least developed countries (LDC⁴) fund* to support the LDCs to carry out national adaptation programmes of action (NAPAs) in which they would

² The UNFCCC has over 190 states that have both signed and ratified it (including the United States of America). All the parties to the Convention meet annually at a Conference of Parties (COP) to review progress in implementing the Convention. The rich countries (listed in Annex 1 of the Convention) also accepted their “common but differentiated responsibilities” to reduce emissions first.

³ The Kyoto Protocol is a protocol under the UNFCCC in which certain countries (listed in Annex B of the protocol) undertook to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases by specified amounts (expressed as a percentage of reduction compared to the 1990 level of emission by the year 2012).

⁴ The least developed countries are a group of 48 of the poorest countries (mostly located in sub-Saharan Africa) within the larger developing countries grouping (which generally negotiates as a group of about 130 developing countries collectively called “G77 and China”) who are recognised as being specially vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change under Article 4.8 of the UNFCCC. The

identify the vulnerabilities to climate change and prioritise actions for adaptation;

- (ii) *The Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)* for all developing countries to support adaptation as well as other activities (including mitigation as well as technology transfer) and
- (iii) *The Adaptation Fund (AF)* to assist developing countries to carry out “concrete” adaptations.

The first two of these funds were established under the UNFCCC and were to be filled by voluntary contributions from the rich countries, and be operated by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), while the third fund was to be replenished from an “adaptation levy” on the clean development mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol. So far the LDC fund has supported the preparation of NAPAs in most of the LDCs and they are expected to be completed over the next 6 to 12 months.

The IPCC is currently preparing its *fourth assessment report* (due out in 2007) which is widely expected to include more information than past reports on actual observations of climatic anomalies across the world in the last decade compared to the last hundred years and make possible connections to climate change. The scientific evidence being produced across a variety of sectors, from hurricanes in the Caribbean; to floods in Asia, Europe and Africa; to droughts in Africa and Asia; to ice-melt in the Greenland ice sheet and polar regions and glaciers in all continents all point towards the inevitable message that human induced climate change is not something we need to worry about in the future but probably something we are already in the middle of.

At the global policy level this will mean a renewed emphasis on efforts to have more mitigation efforts (beyond the year 2012 when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends) as well as doing more for adaptation to climate change in all countries.

Current situation

I would therefore argue that the current climate change problem is very different from the climate change problem we started to address two and a half decades ago. At that time the efforts were primarily focused on trying to *prevent dangerous climate change* impacts by reducing emission through *mitigation* alone. Despite the efforts made so far this has been a failure. For many ecosystems and communities (mainly the poor and vulnerable), there will now be inevitable dangerous climate change impacts within the next one or two decades. This will require *adaptation* to be added to mitigation as twin strategies to combat the climate change problem. Thus the current situation is one in which we will have to redouble mitigation efforts to prevent *catastrophic*, global impacts that will affect the entire globe, while also adapting to the inevitable impacts that will occur in the near term (and to help those who do not have the capacity to adapt on their own).

same article also obliges all signatory countries of the UNFCCC to assist the LDCs to adapt to climate change.

Climate change and development linkages

The climate change and development communities are generally very different in terms of their disciplines, perspectives and time horizons. This has made dialogue across the two communities relatively difficult (until recently). For example the climate change community still (to a large extent) is drawn from natural science or technology based disciplines while the development community tends to be more social science based. Similarly the climate change scenarios tend to be very long term, typically for a hundred years, with some scenarios (e.g. for sea level rise) running for several hundred years. The development community generally does not do such scenarios and when they do they tend to run for five or ten years only (e.g. the Millennium Development Goals run for 15 years up to 2015). Finally, while the impacts of climate change are reasonably robust at the global scale they are more uncertain at local scales where most of the development community operate (although the models are getting better at downscaling their impact results) and where development planners and practitioners wish to be provided with information.

This has generally resulted in a mis-match between the development community's concerns with more near-term matters (and indeed crises, eg. HIV/AIDS, famines, etc) and the climate change community's inability to say much useful on such short time scales and in specific locations.

However, this is now changing rapidly and the information available (on the potential impacts of climate change in different locations) is getting much better. Thus, it is now possible to make some statements such as:

- The impacts of human induced climate change (due to past and current emissions of greenhouse gases) are inevitable in the near term (i.e the next one or two decades) in spite of efforts to reduce emissions.
- Although all regions, countries and communities will feel the impacts, the poor and vulnerable countries (e.g. the least developed countries, small island developing states and the continent of Africa) and poor/vulnerable communities (in all countries) will feel the impacts disproportionately.
- Many of the climate hazards that are familiar in many parts of the globe will become more intense as well as more frequent (e.g. hurricanes, floods and droughts).
- Low lying coastal areas (e.g. in islands and low-lying river deltas) will be subjected to salinization and inundation.
- River basins (and their populations) dependent on glacier ice melt (e.g. in the Andes and Himalayas) will be especially vulnerable to water flow reductions.
- Arid and semi-arid zones will also be especially vulnerable to more intense and more frequent drought conditions.

Why the Development Community should care about Climate Change

In my view the development community needs to care about climate change for the following principle reasons:

- Climate change impacts will be a reality for the next decade or two and cannot be avoided.
- The poorest developing countries as well as the poorest communities in those countries are the ones that will be most at risk.
- The development financing community needs to take such climatic risks into account before committing more investments (if only from a fiduciary responsibility perspective).
- The developing countries themselves need to become more aware about the problem and takes steps to adapt (so far the level of such awareness is quite low amongst the LDCs although higher amongst the SIDS). A point to note here is that while it is a good general rule to be country/partner –driven in identifying development needs, it will not do to expect the countries (or even less the poor/vulnerable communities) themselves to identify climate change as a priority for them- they lack the awareness to do so. So it is incumbent on development partners (whether development funders or development NGOs- who are aware of the problem to bring it up in their discussions with their respective developing country partners) and not wait for the countries/partners to bring it up.
- Even on the issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in future by the developing countries there is much that can be done to promote cleaner and renewable energy technologies and solutions while providing development benefits to the world's poor.
- At a global level the problem of climate change is one of global environmental/social justice-as the impacts will be felt by the poorest citizens on the planet who have contributed the least towards creating the problem- while the richest (who are most responsible) will be able to adapt best.

What the development community can do about climate change

Let me end by describing some things that are already being done by different development actors and make some suggestions that each and every development NGO could think about doing as well:

- Each development organisation needs to become more aware of the climate change issue (in particular on the possible impacts it may have on the agency's own development investments/partners). This is being done by a number of development funders (e.g. DFID is looking at its investment portfolio in Bangladesh, the World Bank is doing the same in India) as well as development NGOs (e.g. the Red Cross is doing so in many of its developing countries).
- In the developing countries, partners need to be brought on board on this issue (e.g. through coalitions of development and environmental NGOs that have started in a number of countries including Bangladesh and Kenya).

- In the developed countries (where many of the international development NGOs are based) there is much that can be done in terms of awareness raising, advocacy and lobbying. Coalitions of development and environmental NGOs such as the Up in Smoke Coalition and Stop Climate Chaos in the UK, as well as similar efforts in Germany, Netherlands and Canada.
- Each organisation (as well as each individual) has a “Carbon footprint” due to our activities in transport, heating and air travel (the latter is generally the largest portion of our Carbon footprint). We should all (both at the individual as well as organisational level) try to first minimise and reduce our Carbon footprints. However, recognising that they are not possible to be reduced to zero we will then have to offset the residual amounts by investing in “Carbon Offsets” (through the voluntary market for Carbon offsets which now exists).
- The global policy on climate change is negotiated and agreed at the annual conference of parties (COPs) of the UNFCCC, where increasingly more attention is being paid to the issue of adaptation (and especially the creation of funds for adaptation as described above). The international development community (both development funding agencies who have been part of the climate change negotiations for some time, but also the development NGOs, who have not) need to engage with this audience and group of actors more vigorously than it has in the past. One avenue to do so is by attending the two-day side event called “Development and Adaptation Days at COP” organised by IIED and the RING.
- Community based adaptation (CBA) is a growing area of interest amongst NGOs and other organisations working with poor and vulnerable communities in developing countries. An international workshop on CBA was held in Bangladesh in January 2005 where some of the early experiences were shared. The second such International Workshop on CBA is due to be held in Bangladesh in January 2007. Organisations that work with poor/vulnerable communities who wish to learn more about (or share their own knowledge of) CBA should participate in this workshop.

My conclusions

My advice to each individual and organisation working on development is therefore:

- Make yourself more aware about the climate change issue (in particular how it might affect you or your organisation or your partners).
- If you find that you (or your partners) are likely to be adversely affected then develop your/their adaptive capacity (and hence enhance their resilience) through awareness raising, training and other interventions.
- Participate in coalitions (if they exist) or help create them (if they do not exist already where you live) of like-minded, development and environmental NGOs for awareness raising, advocacy and lobbying work.
- Calculate your individual (and organisational) carbon footprint and (i) reduce emission as much as possible and (ii) offset what cannot be reduced.

- Participate in the annual UNFCCC meetings (if possible) to do advocacy/lobbying work with other NGOs (the next one will be held in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2006)

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Key websites

- o CLACC: <http://www.clacc.net>
- o IDS: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/>
- o IIED: <http://www.iied.org>
- o IISD: <http://www.iisd.org/>
- o IPCC: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>
- o LCA: <http://www.linkingclimateadaptation.org/>
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