

Official development policy and climate change

“Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, sustainable development has remained elusive for many African countries. Poverty remains a major challenge and most countries on the continent have not benefited fully from the opportunities of globalisation, further exacerbating the continent’s marginalisation.”

**Johannesburg Plan of Implementation,
2002, World Summit on Sustainable Development.**

The challenge of global warming is arriving late on many official agendas. When a much-heralded report from the UK Government about climate change and Africa was finally made public, the fact that the only issue considered in any detail was the need to improve weather forecasting, led to widespread disappointment.⁸⁹

Although more scientific capacity is needed to help Africa cope with global warming, such research will only be effective if it results in strengthening the people’s ability to cope who live in the places most affected by climate change. Resources are always limited and the danger is that a focus on increasing scientific capacity will happen at the expense of investment in adaptation at the community level. Many already have no choice but to adapt to change, and need additional support to strengthen their resilience now. This report has outlined what several of those approaches could be. Building scientific expertise, on the other hand, may take years. However, the report’s recommendation that awareness of climate change must be ‘mainstreamed’ within development policies, planning and activities is welcome.

More high profile and broader ranging was the independent *Commission for Africa* report initiated by the UK Government. It contained five broad recommendations, which governments are not obliged to implement, touching on environmental and climate change issues.

- 1 It supported the Environment Initiative of the African Union’s NEPAD programme, suggesting that donors should strengthen environmental considerations in their programmes.
- 2 Donor governments and institutions, such as the World Bank, UNEP and UNDP, were asked to encourage African governments to include sustainable development in their poverty reduction strategies, and to monitor their environmental performance.

- 3 Donors should work to improve the climate observation network through the Global Climate Observation System, bilateral support.
- 4 Rich countries were encouraged to set targets to use cleaner energy technologies in order to stimulate the global market, and to encourage their use in developing countries.
- 5 Giving one actual target, it also called on donors to make climate variability and climate change risk factors an integral part of their project planning and assessment by 2008. They were also called on to meet their commitments on funding, which currently amount to only \$0.41 billion per year spread across all developing countries, to help African countries adapt to the risks and impacts of climate change.

The wider focus of the Commission’s report was welcome, as was recognising the need to consider risk factors in development planning, and funding for adaptation. But considering the fact that these are recommendations from an independent commission, free of the need to work within the strict parameters of existing government policy, they are weak in a number of regards. They fail to capture the urgency and comprehensiveness of the threat posed by climate change. They fail to call for a proper assessment of the new resource needs that Africa will face. The complex new obstacle that global warming puts in the path of achieving the Millennium Development Goals is inadequately appreciated. Finally, and crucially in the context of glacially slow and often vague international negotiations, the recommendations are almost completely empty of concrete targets and timetables.

Firmer promises were made much earlier in 2002 at the tenth anniversary of the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. There, governments agreed to take action to assist African countries adapt to climate change. In the *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* all governments pledged to:

- *“Combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought and floods...including through the provision of adequate and predictable financial resources to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, as one of the tools for poverty eradication.”* {paragraph.6(l)}

- *“Assist African countries in mobilizing adequate resources for their adaptation needs relating to the adverse effects of climate change, extreme weather events, sea-level rise and climate variability, and assist in developing national climate change strategies and mitigation programmes...”* {paragraph.56(k)}
- *“Provide financial and technical assistance to strengthen the capacities of African countries, including institutional and human capacity, including at the local level, for effective disaster management, including observation and early warning systems, assessments, prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.”* {paragraph.59(a)}
- *“...in cases of most acute water scarcity, support efforts for developing non-conventional water resources...”* {paragraph.60(d)}
- *“Achieve significantly improved sustainable agricultural productivity and food security...”* {paragraph.61}

But three years on, African communities are still struggling to cope with climate variability and extreme weather events, and the agreements made in Johannesburg remain largely unfulfilled. When it comes to rich, high-polluting countries fulfilling their obligations, the difference between rhetoric and reality gets wider the deeper you go.

The United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) requires all signatory countries, and especially the developed countries, to assist the poorest and most vulnerable countries, namely the Least Developed Countries

(LDCs) and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), to adapt to the impacts of climate change.⁹⁰

At the seventh Conference of Parties (COP7) of the Convention, held in Marrakech, Morocco in 2001, a special fund to assist the LDCs – the LDC Fund – was set up with voluntary contributions from the rich countries to assist the LDCs adapt to the potential impacts of climate change. The LDCs comprise nearly fifty of the poorest countries in the world, the majority being located in Sub-Saharan Africa, the others being in the Asia-Pacific region. Under the arrangement each country has been provided with just around \$200,000 to carry out a National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA).

However, the contributions to the LDC Fund up to April 2005 amounted to only about \$33 million of which \$12 million is to be used by the LDCs to carry out the NAPAs, and only \$21 million will be available for implementing adaptation measures identified through the NAPAs. To put that into context, to protect of the vulnerable portion of the coastline of Dar es Salaam against sea level rises over the course of the century, would cost US\$380 million.⁹¹

Out of these contributions, the amount from the G8 countries has been \$6.5 million from Canada, \$3.7 million from Germany, \$0.3 million from France and \$1 million from Italy. Yet, as mentioned above, France announced \$748 million in extra funding for its own hospital emergency services in the summer of 2003, after an estimated 11,435 people died during a record-breaking heatwave.⁹² Notably, several of the richest countries of the G8 such as the US, the UK and Japan, who are all major greenhouse gases emitters, have yet to donate a single penny to the fund.⁹³

The Make Poverty History Coalition

Members of the Make Poverty History Coalition recognise climate change is already affecting the poor, and that the essential policy changes we demand on trade justice, debt and aid will be seriously undermined unless climate change is also tackled. Make Poverty History therefore welcomes the fact that climate change is high on the political agenda this year. Make Poverty History has prioritised trade justice, debt and aid for the focus of our campaigning in 2005. We are supportive of the work of other coalitions working on climate change and, recognising the importance of coordination, seek to work with them where possible. Make Poverty History also welcomes the support for our demands from the environmental movement and coalitions campaigning on climate change.

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