

Funding Climate Adaptation

The Challenge of Identifying Particularly Vulnerable Countries

Richard J.T. Klein

Introduction

The upcoming United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen (formally known as the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or COP15), will need to address a number of issues that have proved to be stumbling blocks in the negotiations to date. One of these is the provision of financial resources to developing countries to support their adaptation activities. Here, the question is not only how much money would need to be made available, but also, how the international governance of this money should be organised. One dimension of the governance question concerns which developing countries are eligible for financial support for adaptation, and which countries should be prioritised. This article describes the challenge of measuring and comparing countries' vulnerability for this purpose.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) commits developed countries "to assist developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in meeting costs of adaptation to those adverse effects" (Article 4.4). But the UNFCCC does not say which countries are particularly vulnerable, or how one should go about identifying these countries. As a result, ever since the UNFCCC was agreed in 1992, questions have arisen over what it means

(Above) Participants of a General Assembly meeting on the "Climate change and the most vulnerable countries - The imperative to act."

(Right) Solar power panels generate energy for a newly renovated local administrative building, erected by the Government of Liberia



to be "particularly vulnerable", and how to decide which countries fall into this category. As this article will show, these are primarily political questions, not academic ones.

The word "vulnerable" appears four times in the text of the UNFCCC; it is preceded by the adverb "particularly" three times. Its first mention is in the nineteenth preambular paragraph, which already appears to give at least a partial answer to the question of which countries are particularly vulnerable:

"Recognizing further that low-lying and other small island countries, countries with low-lying coastal, arid and semi-arid areas or areas liable to floods, drought and desertification, and developing countries with fragile mountainous ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change[.]"

The second mention is in Article 3.2, which is the principle that "[t]

he specific needs and special circumstances of developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, and of those Parties, especially developing country Parties, that would have to bear a disproportionate or abnormal burden under the Convention, should be given full consideration." The third mention is in Article 4.4, cited in the first paragraph of this article, which can be considered as making the first part of Article 3.2 operational.

Article 4.8 of the UNFCCC reiterates in part the nineteenth preambular paragraph, listing several groups of countries with "specific needs and concerns":

"In the implementation of the commitments in this Article, the Parties shall give full consideration to what actions are necessary under the Convention, including actions related to funding, insurance, and the transfer of technology, to meet

the specific needs and concerns of developing country Parties arising from the adverse effects of climate change... especially on:

- (a) Small island countries;
 - (b) Countries with low-lying coastal areas;
 - (c) Countries with arid and semi-arid areas, forested areas and areas liable to forest decay;
 - (d) Countries with areas prone to natural disasters;
 - (e) Countries with areas liable to drought and desertification;
 - (f) Countries with areas of high urban atmospheric pollution;
 - (g) Countries with areas with fragile ecosystems, including mountainous ecosystems.
- ..."

The group of least developed countries gets a special mention in the UNFCCC. Article 4.9 states that “[t]he Parties shall take full account of the specific needs and special situations of the least developed countries in their actions with regard to funding and transfer of technology.”

Implementation of the UNFCCC: Towards Adaptation Funding

The Kyoto Protocol contains the word “vulnerable” once, in Article 12.8. This article provided the basis of what later became the Adaptation Fund:

“The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Protocol shall ensure that a share of the proceeds from certified project activities [under the Clean Development Mechanism] is used to cover administrative expenses as well as to assist developing country Parties that are particularly vulnerable to the

adverse effects of climate change to meet the costs of adaptation.”

Meanwhile, the question of which countries might be considered particularly vulnerable remained unsolved. The Adaptation Fund Board faced this issue in 2008 when preparing the Strategic Priorities, Policies and Guidelines of the Adaptation Fund. In Paragraph 10 it states:

“Eligible Parties to receive funding from the Adaptation Fund are understood as developing country Parties to the Kyoto Protocol that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change

including low-lying and other small island countries, countries with low-lying coastal, arid and semi-arid areas or areas liable to floods, drought and desertification, and developing countries with fragile mountainous ecosystems.”

This is the same listing as in the UNFCCC preamble, but the additional word “including” implies that the possibility exists that countries not covered by the preamble could still be particularly vulnerable and, therefore, eligible for funding from the Adaptation Fund. An approach towards the prioritisation among eligible Parties is



(Above) forum of leaders of 8 major industrialized countries (G-8) on climate change.

(Below) Plastic bottles and garbage waste from a nearby village wash on the shores of a river and then spill into the sea. Dili, Timor-Leste.

presented in Paragraph 16 of the Strategic Priorities, Policies and Guidelines of the Adaptation Fund. It lists seven criteria that “[t]he decision on the allocation of resources of the Adaptation Fund among eligible Parties shall take into account.” The first of these criteria is “Level of vulnerability”; other criteria include “Level of urgency and risks arising from delay” and “Adaptive capacity to the adverse effects of climate change.”

The Strategic Priorities, Policies and Guidelines of the Adaptation Fund do not provide further detail on the use of these seven criteria, and neither do the Draft Provisional Operational Policies and Guidelines for Parties to Access Resources from the Adaptation Fund, which were adopted at the seventh meeting of the Adaptation Fund Board, in September 2009.

From Bali to Copenhagen

While the Adaptation Fund Board follows the UNFCCC preamble, in 2007, Parties had put forward a different grouping of “particularly vulnerable” countries in the Bali Action Plan. The Bali Action Plan launched “a comprehensive process to enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention through long-term cooperative action, now, up to and beyond 2012, in order to reach an agreed outcome and adopt a decision at its fifteenth session [in Copenhagen in December 2009].” The so-called Copenhagen Agreed Outcome is intended to shape international climate policy for many years to come, and the Bali Action Plan lists the issues Parties wish to see addressed in the outcome. These include:

- “1(c) Enhanced action on adaptation, including, inter alia, consideration of:
 - (i) International cooperation to support urgent implementation of adaptation ac-

tions ... taking into account the urgent and immediate needs of developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, especially the least developed countries and small island developing States, and further taking into account the needs of countries in Africa affected by drought, desertification and floods; ...

- (iii) Disaster reduction strategies and means to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.”

In Paragraph 1(c)(i) above, the word “especially” does not exclude the possibility of support to developing countries not listed here. However, it implies that a certain priority be given to the countries listed. The Bali Action Plan established the Ad hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA). During the negotiations under the AWG-LCA, some Parties challenged the implicit prioritisation in Paragraph 1(c)(i) and proposed ways of establishing the vulnerability of developing countries. Bangladesh, for example, proposed the development of a vulnerability index during discussions on the Adaptation Fund in Poznan in December 2008. Other Parties proposed alternative listings of countries, with reference to the Bali Action Plan, the UNFCCC preamble or Article 4.8, depending on which listing would ensure their inclusion.

The negotiating text prepared by the Chair of the AWG-LCA and discussed at its sixth session in June 2009 as the basis for a Copenhagen Agreed Outcome, states that “[i]n prioritizing support, the level of

vulnerability, determined by national circumstances, respective financial and technical capabilities, levels of risk and impacts as well as levels of poverty and climate change exposure, should be taken into account.” In addition to its focus on particularly vulnerable countries, the negotiating text also states that in providing support, priority shall or should be given to “particularly vulnerable populations, groups and communities, especially the poor, women, children, the elderly, indigenous peoples, minorities and those suffering from disability.”

The Political Challenge

The current state of the negotiations reveals that Parties disagree on both the meaning of “particularly vulnerable” and on how to decide which countries fall into this category. The idea of establishing a vulnerability index that can provide an “objective” answer is therefore increasingly viewed with interest. However, different people have different views on how to consider, for example, risks to people’s lives and livelihoods, risks to ecosystems, and risks to infrastructure and economic assets. The ensuing ambiguity is reflected in the range of (mainly index-based) approaches that already exist to compare and rank the vulnerability of countries.

In spite of the academic effort to date, the political dimension of deciding which countries are particularly vulnerable (and thereby prioritised for funding), makes it unlikely that agreement will be reached on one common metric of vulnerability, and one approach to measure it. This is not to say that measuring vulnerability is a futile exercise. However, a clear distinction must be made between the positive and the normative steps involved in assessing and measuring vulnerability. Identifying countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects

of climate change involves two normative steps. Decisions are needed on:

- The factors to be considered in measuring countries' vulnerability (as well as other methodological aspects, such as attaching relative weights to these factors);
- The criteria to be applied in establishing what constitutes "particularly vulnerable" (e.g. an index value above a certain agreed threshold).

One way of ensuring that the academic and political challenges of measuring vulnerability are not confused, is for the negotiators to assume responsibility for decisions on these two politically sensitive steps,

rather than to expect independent experts to provide a solution on which all Parties can agree. Parties are not unfamiliar with the use of indices to inform resource allocations, as shown in the remainder of this section. For example, experience with the Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), may inform negotiations on the level of vulnerability of developing country Parties. Under the RAF, resources are being allocated to countries based on their potential to generate global environmental benefits, and their capacity, policies and practices to successfully implement GEF projects. The RAF is based on two indices: the GEF Benefits Index and the GEF Performance Index.

However, at the 25th GEF Council Meeting in June 2005, countries raised strong objections to the proposal of a RAF. Among other things, they stated:

"We specifically oppose the ranking and categorization of recipient countries through non-transparent assessments based on questionable criteria. GEF resources should not be pre-allocated on such a basis."

The RAF demonstrates the difficulty in reaching agreement on indicators and indices for the purpose of allocating resources for mitigation activities. It suggests that the political dimension involved in the development and use of indices to support or

The GECHS Project

Synthesizing 10-Years of Global Environmental Change and Human Security Research

Linda Sygna

The Global Environmental Change and Human Security (GECHS) project became a core project under the auspices of the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP) in 1999. The science plan set the foundation for exploring the relationship between global environmental change and human security, through interdisciplinary, integrative and international research collaboration and extensive dialogue with policy makers and stakeholders. Today, 10 years after its launch, the GECHS project has grown into a wide and strong network of researchers, and human security (HS) has become a

core theme within the global environmental change (GEC) arena.

The GECHS project is now in a synthesis phase, which is, foremost, an opportunity to highlight the results of 10 years of research on the societal consequences of and responses to GEC and its implications for HS. It is a time to reflect on how far we have come in understanding these linkages. At the same time, the synthesis process also presents an opportunity to identify directions for future research on HS.

A major event in the GECHS synthesis process was the GECHS Synthesis Conference "Human Security in an Era of Global Change"

that took place from June 22-24, 2009, at the University of Oslo in Oslo, Norway. With 24 sessions and a total of 94 paper presentations, this conference was, more than anything, a showcase for the research that has been done within the GECHS network. First and foremost, there has been considerable progress in the way that HS and GEC are conceptualised. In terms of HS, there has been an increasing focus on the human dimensions of security, and in particular, how individuals and communities can respond to an assortment of stresses that threaten their social, environmental and human rights. In terms of GEC, the socioeconomic/political context has become more central to understanding the causes and consequences of biophysical changes. A second area of progress has been the large body of empirical research that has been carried out worldwide on how HS is affected and transformed by environmental change. Lastly,

justify funding decisions, presents a major challenge to the acceptability of any index. There is no indication that it will be any less difficult for Parties to agree on or accept a vulnerability index to guide resource allocation decisions for adaptation.

Conclusion

The ambiguity surrounding the questions of which countries are particularly vulnerable and how to determine this is at the heart of the governance problem of resource allocation and prioritisation. This article argues that negotiators would be misguided to think they can rely on ex-

ternal experts to develop a definitive, objective and unchallengeable method to rank countries according to their vulnerability to climate change. There is no objectivist “truth” in vulnerability assessment; any agreed approach will have to be the socially constructed outcome of a negotiation process. Academics and other external experts may well provide input into this process (e.g. by proposing methods and collecting data), but eventually it requires normative decisions on how vulnerability is defined, what constitutes “particular vulnerability”, and which countries can be designated as such. These normative decisions represent a negotiated compromise of different and biased interpretations of vulner-

ability. Such negotiation is the work of politicians, not of academics.

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Note

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there have been important advances in linking research with policy and practitioner activities, with the aim of identifying ways of enhancing human capabilities to respond to environmental change and create positive social change.

Environmental governance has been a central theme within the GECHS project. Research has focused on complex and dynamic governance structures, both locally and globally, particularly the institutions that enable sustainable environmental governance. How to address the challenges of GEC, including increased risks, multiple stressors, multiple scales, social vulnerability, conflicts, forced migration, scarcity, etc, has been central to much of the research both within the water sector and the climate change domain. Key research themes include the implications of globalization for national and trans-boundary water governance, and the implications of a changing climate

for social contracts that define rights and responsibilities between states and citizens. How individuals and communities respond to environmental challenges and how these responses are enabled or hindered by national and international politics and governance structures is central from a human security perspective.

Synthesising these advances in various publications and outreach activities will be the focus of the GECHS project in the next year or so. At the same time, much attention will be given towards identifying future research needs. The GECHS project in its current form will come to an end in June 2010. However, with the global environmental challenges facing humanity, addressing HS is essential. A momentum exists within both the research and policy community that is worth building on; hopefully, a committed group of researchers see the potential in bringing GECHS re-

search into a new phase and another 10 years of successful endeavours.

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