



Helping People and  
The Planet Thrive



# Making Adaptation Pro-Poor and Pro-Ecosystem

## Policy Brief - Adaptation

A healthy environment is critical to people living in poverty who are highly dependent on its resources for their survival and well-being. **While climate change threatens us all, the world's poorest people are most immediately and profoundly impacted, particularly women and other marginalized groups.** It is imperative that we support their efforts to build resilience and adapt in the most effective and sustainable way possible.

### Why adapt?

A certain degree of climate change is inevitable. Past emissions have set in motion longer-term changes for which people must prepare. It is a profound injustice then that the world's poorest people, who have contributed the *least* to climate change, are hardest hit.

**ADAPTATION IS THE ADJUSTMENT IN NATURAL OR HUMAN SYSTEMS IN RESPONSE TO ACTUAL OR EXPECTED CLIMATIC STIMULI OR THEIR EFFECTS, WHICH MODERATES HARM OR EXPLOITS BENEFICIAL OPPORTUNITIES.<sup>1</sup>**

Climate change can negatively impact food security, ecosystems and their services, human health, and water resources, with serious implications for economic development and political stability. It threatens to increase the frequency, severity and intensity of weather-related hazards, such as drought, violent storms, heavy precipitation and resulting flooding. If left unchecked, it could wipe out decades of development and conservation gains.

### Scale of need

The need for adaptation action is already substantial and will only grow over time. While estimates vary, the consensus for adaptation costs in developing countries is in the tens of billions of dollars per year.<sup>2</sup> For developing countries to plan for the short- and long-term and implement effective adaptation actions, they need access to adequate, predictable and sustainable funding that is new and additional to existing foreign aid targets.



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**CARE and WWF believe that a successful adaptation approach must integrate both communities and ecosystems. We, therefore, recommend the following for an integrated approach:**

#### **Prioritization of most vulnerable regions and populations**

Support for adaptation action must reach the people and places that need it most. Vulnerability to climate change varies not only between regions and ecosystems, but within countries, communities and even households. Vulnerability is more than exposure to climate shocks and stresses. It is affected by economic, social and political systems, which shape people's capacity to adapt, as well as the health and vulnerability of ecosystems on which poor people depend. The most vulnerable must be identified through vulnerability assessments that include these considerations along with geographic location.

#### **Recognize, protect and leverage ecosystems and ecosystem services**

Given ecosystems' importance to poor, resource-dependent communities, adaptation activities should be built on vulnerability assessments for ecosystems and people. Since ecosystem services often protect against extreme weather impacts — wetlands and forests provide alternative livelihoods if crops fail and mangroves can reduce

<sup>1</sup>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Third Assessment Report, 2001 a. Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Cambridge University Press

<sup>2</sup>In a study released in 2009, the World Bank suggested costs between \$75-\$100 billion per year between 2010 and 2050, while Oxfam in 2008 estimated needs to be at least US\$ 50 billion per year. The UNDP estimates that the costs could be up to \$86 billion per year by 2015.

storm surge impacts — “green infrastructure” like mangrove forests should be included in adaptation measures. With poor communities’ buy-in for such initiatives, restoration and maintenance of ecosystem function can be cost-effective and mutually beneficial. Incorporating ecosystem approaches into people-centered adaptation addresses the interdependency between vulnerable communities and the environment, avoids significant additional pressures on natural systems and prevents maladaptation (activities with short-term benefits which in the longer term actually increase vulnerability).

### Transparent and inclusive decision-making

The inequitable distribution of rights, resources and power — factors that often keep people trapped in poverty — and repressive cultural norms and rules constrain many people’s, especially women’s, ability to respond to climate change. To meet the adaptation needs of the most vulnerable and promote their ownership, these populations must be guaranteed participation in all related decision-making, including in natural resource management. The extent and impact of their participation should be monitored and evaluated.

### Incorporation of gender equality and women’s empowerment

Women tend to be disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. They are more likely to be injured/killed in natural disasters and are often responsible for climate-sensitive tasks like gathering food, fuel and water. Yet, as the primary gatherers of these resources, women possess valuable knowledge about effective solutions to the problems associated with climate change. Adaptation must build off that knowledge; support women *and* men to access the resources, rights and opportunities necessary to adapt; and empower them to challenge and change inequalities.

### “Climate-smart” development

While the impacts of climate change require dedicated efforts to increase the resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems, climate change also demands new thinking about planning, development and conservation. Climate change impacts can seriously affect development and conservation results, in some cases completely reversing any previous gains. Governments and development/conservation practitioners must, therefore, integrate climate change risks, impacts and vulnerability into policies, plans and actions, making those efforts “climate-smart.” This will help protect past gains and build resilience into current efforts.

If development interventions take climate change and the health of ecosystems into account, they can significantly contribute to the adaptive capacity of poor people and their ecosystems. An integrated community and ecosystem approach increases benefits and ensures a more lasting impact.

*The Sundarbans mangroves in the Bay of Bengal are a natural buffer from cyclones and storm surges, but exploitation of the area and the impacts of climate change have eroded this buffer. With sea level rise and increasingly intense cyclones and tidal surges, continued degradation is likely to increase people’s and species’ vulnerability. In response, WWF is working with communities on an integrated approach for improving resiliency of the region by protecting and improving ecosystems, while also addressing the critical needs of local communities through awareness-raising and advocacy. Adaptation activities include mangrove replanting, testing saline-resilient paddy varieties, promoting sustainable aquaculture practices, and installing pond sand filters to ensure availability of safe drinking water, in addition to disaster risk reduction activities.*



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*With almost 2000 miles of coast, Vietnam is vulnerable to sea level rise and typhoons, as well as changing rainfall patterns. Following Typhoon Damrey, CARE partnered with the Da Loc commune to increase their resilience to disasters and climate variability through alternative livelihood training and irrigation infrastructure to combat soil salination after the typhoon. The communities also planted and maintain 250 hectares of mangrove forest, managing the nursery and forming a mangrove protection team. Based on their willingness and capacity to protect the mangroves, the district authority granted them the land-management rights for five years. Now, over 8000 people in six villages benefit from increased protection from violent storms.*



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