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Discussion Group 1 Summary Report:

Environmental Change, Insecurity, Conflict and Migration

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Session Report: Ken Webster, Phil Champain and Felipe de Jesus Colon

Should climate change alter the way we see the relations between development, security policy and migration policy? What are the implications of this for development agencies?

There was a background paper available for this workshop* but not all participants had read it and it was decided to simply use the theme and subsidiary questions as a jumping-off point

There are huge uncertainties about climate change issues. We do not know with any certainty what the impacts of climate change are going to be. However, developing countries often have less adaptive capacity since they have fewer resources, so developed countries seem obligated to bring more support at a larger scale and longer duration, not least because worsening conditions will tend to increase conflict and militancy, promote migration (both internal and cross-border) and undermine development with obvious consequences for security, migration and the economies of developed countries. What kind of governance structures are needed to deal with adaptation? What kinds of conversations are needed? What kind of knowledge do we need for these conversations to occur?

* http://climateanddevelopment.nri.org/background_papers/champain_and_webster_env_conflict_i.pdf

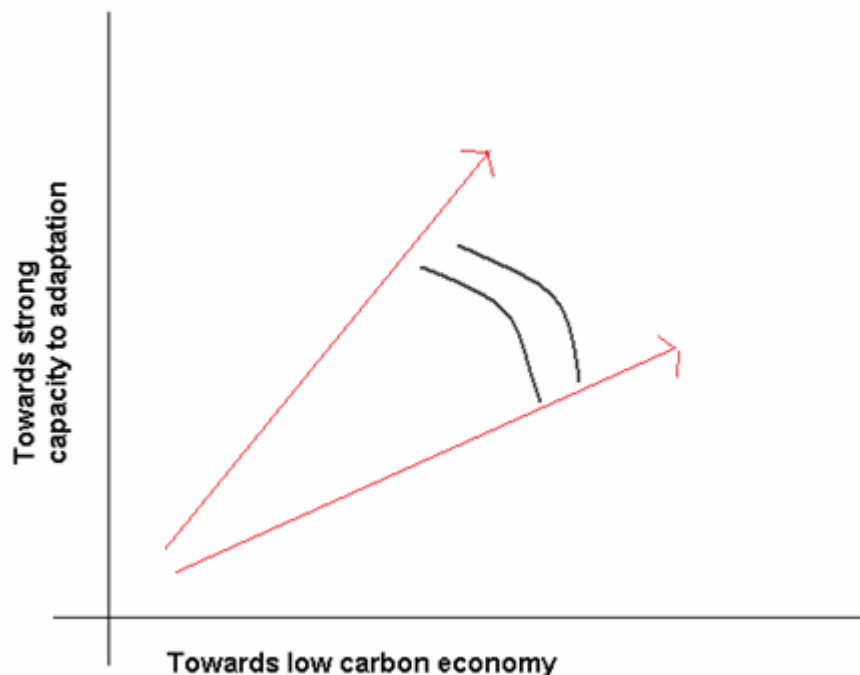
A number of comments about the focus on adaptation were contextualised: without successful mitigation climate change could/will be runaway. The suspicion was that climate change was being seen as an event or series of events which exhibited proportionality- this much temperature rise that much impact - i.e. that it was comprehensible in policy terms, whereas the likelihood is that climate change will be nonlinear - exhibiting abrupt change, positive feedbacks etc and is not readily comprehensible in policy terms in the way that say, a changing demographic might be or a one-off event like a tsunami. Indeed the greater the temperature rise the less adaptation policy can mean in isolation. Adaptation policy has to be related to the expectation of success in mitigation.

Another telling comment was that climate change was symptomatic of a failing economic system (feedback from costs not accounted for) and that consequently it was uncomfortable to look at climate change adaptation and policy if an assumption was made that it was business as usual.

The diagram from the background paper was introduced into the discussion (see below), suggesting a need to shift the direction of development policy towards fostering a low-carbon economy. There is a need to strengthen the adaptive capacity of countries (and that such adaptation should particularly be around the need for stability, income, credible legislation and so on to deal with climate change without conflict.) but it may need to bring on board what climate change is saying about the state of the economic model. This other side of the coin is sustainability.

The price of carbon is not yet adequately deployed in the economy. We need to consider what will happen to the economy if – as seems

to be happening - climate change is mirrored by rising fossil fuel energy prices and other shortages, particularly of water.



Carbon is both a problem in terms of emissions and climate change and because easy to obtain supplies of fossil fuels may soon plateau.

We need to consider both parts of the diagram. The upper left arrow considers actions to strength adaptive capacity but we also need to consider the upper right arrow, the necessity of acting towards a low carbon economy. The current economic system is mostly producing waste. A low carbon economy is both necessary and becoming inevitable – not only climate change mitigation (possible emissions trading post-Kyoto for example) but adaptation to changed economic relationships caused by high prices will bring this to the fore.

Can we realistically assume 'business as usual' and be able to concentrate on climate change adaptation when considering improving a community's resilience, its overall adaptive capacity?

A number of participants were supportive of the proposal intellectually but could not see the practical 'doability' of it, such is the pervasiveness of the short term and the 'cheap energy' mindset, particularly in conflict prone societies with limited economic, social and natural capital -and where powerful vested interests do not wish to hear this message. Will one be invited to the table?

Discussion around technologies is perhaps inevitable at some stage and there was discussion around the community-enhancing possibilities of devolved and distributed energy in the manner of information (internet 'nodes' model), and the "leapfrogging development" example of mobile phones was offered within the group, alongside cautionary statements about the claimed potential of many technological offerings falling short.

Low carbon case studies were looked for and this included wider use of 'closed loop' models in agriculture. Cuba's efforts in the mid-1990s touched on the urban situation. Predicated on an authoritarian regime it did nevertheless show adaptation and resilience despite hardship.

There were some general comments that a cheap energy economy tended to distance people from each other and from the food they ate and products they consumed, this process makes communities less adaptive. A low carbon economy might of itself improve resilience and improve adaptation to climate change as it potentially reconnects people in multiple ways.