

## **DFID/DSA Policy Forum, Monday 2 June 2008**

### **Discussion Group 3 Summary Report:**

#### **Climate Change and Disasters**

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***Session Report: Nina Hughes and John Morton***

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The two questions and ten sub-questions set out in the discussion paper were made available, and Terry Cannon made an additional presentation on a typology of climate adaptation approaches. Discussion was wide-ranging; we present a synthesis of the most important points made across the two groups.

#### *Scale*

Questions of scale were seen to be very important in talking about both disaster risk reduction and other forms of building adaptive capacity: are we talking about resilience at the level of local communities or regions?

#### *Disaster Risk Reduction alongside Other Development Priorities*

In disaster risk reduction it will be important to consider the (increasing) threat of climate disasters alongside both projected trends in average climate parameters and non-climate stressors. There should not be an artificial separation of trends in extreme events from trends in means (although trends in extreme events may be a useful way of “selling” climate change adaptation to policy makers). Risk perception, not necessarily real risks, drives policy as it influences policy makers. This can be harnessed: extreme events have provided an opportunity for momentum and change. However, this is not guaranteed to do the right thing and change behaviour: disasters are not always windows of opportunity. There is good evidence (e.g. from Community Risk Assessments) that poor people in developing countries are more concerned with day-to-day issues, such as declining livelihoods and health, rather than either disasters or longer-run climate change. This raises questions about the need for *transfer of knowledge* about climate change to poor people, but also the way such knowledge can be transferred: in dialogue and by integrating it with discussion of other livelihood needs. Farmers can become interested in longer-term perspectives through such processes.

## *Building Resilience*

A lot of work has been done on short-term forecasting for farmers, but better (more trusted and more responsive) institutions are needed for communication of forecasts.

Communication of information should not be carried out in isolation, but with initiatives that build networks and emphasise user engagement. This work needs to incorporate longer-term planning into everyday changes, and move toward long-term increased resilience.

It was commented on that there are examples of good practice within disaster management (e.g. strategic grain reserves). Others pointed out that most national policies are much less geared to true disaster risk reduction than to normal humanitarian reaction. Better links between disaster management and development policies could provide much improved actions and solutions that link up with climate change.

It was suggested that reducing risk could be achieved by improving co-ordination, building infrastructure and resilience frameworks. Preparedness for climate events should be on the basis that they are very likely to happen again and that good systems need to be in place to deal with them.

It was pointed out that awareness within communities has to be heightened with regard to changing trends in climate, to increase livelihood resilience to changing crops, but that it is difficult to change governments' views and difficult to marry economic objectives with vulnerability and social impact reduction. Overall this highlighted the importance of governance, and underlined the importance of information dissemination at all scales.

## *Disaster Risk Reduction and Longer-Term Adaptation*

The point was made that it is not helpful to treat climate change adaptation as an overlay to existing programs that cut across established processes. The new adaptation discourse is not always helpful: existing DRR activities need to be modified to incorporate climate change, not to re-badge adaptation. Development itself also needs to be disaster and climate proof, something that is only recently being accepted. The idea of adaptation pathways can be used by policy makers to re-frame and re-think ways in which shocks can be buffered and adaptive capacities improved.

Some concern was expressed as to whether the concept of the 'adaptation gap' was useful as a way of understanding the differences in resources needed for current needs and any additional requirements for adaptation. If current needs are 'developmental', then their proper fulfilment should enable adequate climate-proofing. There is also the danger that a focus on an 'adaptation gap' may suggest that factors (e.g. food prices, energy costs) that affect livelihoods and poverty are not so important. Others contended that there are very specific requirements for climate-proofing that must include 'shocks' (disasters), and that it is self-evident that conventional development (and economic growth) has failed to take these into account. Therefore adaptation to climate change must include adequate adaptation measures for disasters.