



Consejo Latinoamericano  
de Ciencias Sociales  
Conselho Latino-americano  
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## SOUTH-SOUTH COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMME

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### COMPARATIVE RESEARCH WORKSHOP

## Inequality and Climate Change: Perspectives from the South

### BACKGROUND CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE THIRD CLACSO-CODESRIA-IDEAS SOUTH-SOUTH COMPARATIVE RESEARCH WORKSHOP 2014

Global inequality is part of the regime under which climate change is occurring and in which it has to be managed. Despite its multidimensional nature, the relationship between inequality and climate change is certainly one of the most important features of the distribution of global material and resource use and its impact on environmental degradation. Challenging power relations and inequality and upholding human rights might seem a long way off from adaptation to climate change. But the logic is that people are vulnerable to climate change because of the unequal power structures in their society.

The warming of the climate system is expected to be greatest at the poles (2 to 3 times the global average) and least in the tropics. Evidence abounds of receding glaciers, rising sea levels, shifting seasons, increasing ocean and land surface temperatures. Despite its manifestations in nature, climate change is a social problem and it's in this dimension that the relationship between inequality and climate change becomes more relevant. Experts estimate that developed economies with 15% of the global population and utilizing about half of global resources have contributed to large increases in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the atmosphere through the burning fossil fuels, that has contributed immensely to climate change.

Beyond this basic story inequities abound. The regions (Asia, Africa and Latin America) most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are generally those that have contributed the least to the problem and also have the least infrastructure for managing and adapting to the impact of climate change. Even with the emergence of China, which has impacted this distribution markedly, the case still remains that a small fraction of the world's population is responsible for two-thirds of global GHG emissions (Shah 2010). Other studies estimate that since the mid-eighteen century, developed countries have contributed 77% of global GHG emissions (Raupach et al 2007). Additionally, recent studies have shown that 20% of the world's wealthiest population is responsible for consuming about 80% of global resources, such as gas, oil and coal. This is exacerbating the devastating impacts of climate change on ecosystems and people's access to food, fresh water, land and energy (Smith 2013). According to IPCC assessment reports, while the African continent contributes less than 4% of the global GHG, about 70 million Africans will be exposed to water shortage by 2020. This is a clear example of the inequitable exposure to the impacts of climate change.

Climate change will have direct impacts on development with regard to climate-sensitive activities such as agriculture. It is a significant threat for people living in developing countries due to the high reliance of their livelihoods on climate-sensitive economic activities such as rain-fed agriculture, livestock rearing, forestry, and marine ecosystems. These are also often the communities with the least infrastructure for managing and adapting to the impacts of climate change. In Africa climate change is expected to exacerbate existing challenges such as land tenure insecurity, inequality and marginalization of rural populations, weak natural resource governance and management, slash and burn agriculture, deforestation and its attendant soil degradation problems and lack of access to modern energy

In addition to its direct consequences, climate change will have indirect consequences on social issues such as poverty and education. It is likely to exacerbate inequalities due to the uneven distribution of the costs associated with its negative impacts since poor communities tend to live on marginal lands and in areas prone to extreme weather events. Typhoon Haiyan, for example, has left several thousands dead and rendered hundreds of thousands homeless in the Philippines. It has underscored for many development experts a cruel truth about climate change: it will hit the world's poorest the hardest. Alternative development pathways will influence the capacity of communities and countries to adapt to climate change and will also determine future GHG emissions.

For the global South, climate change will make poverty reduction and the attainment of development goals increasingly difficult. The 2001 report of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>1</sup> identified a range of poverty related climate change impacts, including:

- Reductions in crop yields in most tropical and subtropical regions due to flooding, temperature changes, decreased water availability and new insect incidence. Falls in agricultural productivity of up to 30% are projected over the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- A 9-25% fall in net farm income in India from temperature rises of between 2 to 3.5 degrees Celsius
- Increased movement of people from coastal and low lying areas
- Increased frequency of extreme climatic events such as El Nino. Pacific cyclones are predicted to increase by 10-20%.

As the concept note underpinning the proposal for the current phase of the Tri-Continental Collaborative Programme rightly states, studies and debates are still needed to identify the multifaceted nature of climate change. These include, *inter alia*: the nature of evidence for climate change; the ways in which people and communities perceive climate change; and most importantly, climate change's impacts on livelihoods and development prospects in the South.

The policies that are formulated and implemented to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate changes tend to be inadequate as they are based on incomplete information, are implemented with very limited resources, and in many cases do not relate to the needs of the affected populations. The inadequacy or lack of the information required to formulate appropriate adaptation strategies in various sectors, regions and populations in countries of the global south is the result of poor meteorological infrastructure and a paucity of the human resources needed to conduct robust climate observation and undertake rigorous climate science. In addition, there are other barriers to adaptation, which may include economic and class interests, cultures and values, the prioritization of growth to equity or long-term sustainability and resource constraints. Yet, despite these obstacles societies, communities and countries must adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change such as floods, droughts, pests and diseases outbreaks etc. With time we should expect this effort to govern climate change adaptation and mitigation to become increasingly contested as demands for more representation and democratization of the policy formulation process increase.

Climate Change research in Africa is often carried out by natural scientists focused on physical impacts on the natural realm including ecological systems, biodiversity and variability in rainfall, drought and flooding patterns to understand the implications on food systems, water scarcity etc. The social dimensions of climate change have received much less attention. Therefore, it is imperative that we identify the challenges that are confronting social sciences and humanities in their capacity to explore the impacts of climate change. Coping mechanisms drawn from indigenous knowledge systems and practices should, similarly, be properly documented, analyzed and shared. Efforts should also be made to mainstream adaptation strat-

1 See [http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc\\_tar/wg2/index.htm](http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/wg2/index.htm)

egies into sustainable development goals and policies. In contextualizing these issues, the question arises of whether there are common spheres for cooperation amongst the countries of the South. If yes, what are they? In addressing climate change as a social problem, social scientists in the South could develop shared perspectives to enhance informed participation in global debates on climate change.

The following are the sub-themes of the workshop:

#### **a) Climate Justice and Ethics**

Climate Change is a “Global Commons” problem requiring collective action. However, there are disjointed efforts to combat this problem. The most vulnerable are generally those who have contributed the least to the problem, have very low adaptive capacity and least infrastructure to cope. Given that those who are the major emitters of GHG are the least affected, how can they be motivated to change? What are the challenges of countries of the global south in terms of the forging of concerted positions in climate negotiations? How much of a voice do the most vulnerable have in the negotiation of issues related to climate change? How are global climate agreements negotiated and in whose interest? How can we enforce the principle of equity in accordance with common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities to mitigate? Should all people be deemed to have an equal stake in the atmosphere, and hence rights in and responsibilities for the future of our planet? What are the issues related to climate change around which social movements based in the South are most actively mobilized? What strategies and counter models of environmental governance and development are being adopted or proposed by southern movements engaged in struggles for climate justice?

#### **b) Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security**

Food security is a major area of concern. Climate change and climate variability amongst other factors could alter agricultural productivity globally. Countries of the global south with large populations heavily reliant on subsistence rain fed agriculture are particularly vulnerable. How are agricultural policies in the South informed by climate related agricultural research? How are these policies building resilience in the agricultural sector, increasing productivity to support economic growth, poverty reduction and improvement of livelihoods? Are there collective strategies for tackling these issues, which are informed by Southern perspectives?

#### **c) Climate Change and Natural Resources Management**

What are the new challenges confronting natural resource management and governance in the context of climate change? How do we manage natural resources to mitigate climate change and support economic growth and development, poverty reduction, and improve livelihoods? What are the emerging trends in natural resource exploitation and conservation in the context of climate change?

#### **d) Climate Change, Conflict and Human Security**

Climate change has been recognized as a threat to international peace and security. Climate change threatens the basic needs of humans, such as water, food, resource allocation, which could result in forced migration, raise tensions and trigger conflicts. The challenge in understanding the security consequences of climate change is complex. Can climate change on its own or in conjunction with other drivers contribute to violent conflicts? How do Southern countries understand the security implications of climate change and how are they addressing these?

#### **e) Climate Change and Gender Equality**

There are complex linkages between climate change and gender inequalities in the South. It is globally recognized that women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. They could also play a vital role in combating and

finding solutions to its related problems. How can we better understand the complex nexus between gender and climate change? How are gender considerations integrated into climate change policies at the national and regional levels? How advanced is the so-called 'feminization of agriculture' in Africa? Is agriculture becoming increasingly predominantly a female sector in Africa? How are economic policies favoring industrialization, to the neglect of the agricultural sector with particular focus on domestic food production? How is this impacting the exodus of rural people to urban or mining areas in search of income-earning opportunities in mines, large export-oriented commercial farms, fishing enterprises and other businesses? Is this leading to the further relegation of women left behind in such migrations to housekeeping?

**f) Climate Change and Sustainable Development**

Climate change has the potential of setting back the development of many countries of the global south. Countries have to fashion ways to address climate change without compromising their economic growth and development. How are Southern countries mainstreaming climate change policies into development and economic policies? How do countries foster low carbon development pathways?

**g) Adaptation Strategies: Country Perspectives and Best Practices**

What are some of the best climate change adaptation practices? How can Southern countries share these best practices? How can they best integrate short, medium and long-term adaptation strategies into sectorial policies, thus addressing among other things, the financial bottlenecks of adaptation? What are some of the indigenous adaptation strategies to disasters that could be relevant to climate change adaptation?