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Pioneering study shows evidence of loss & damage today from the front lines of climate change: Vulnerable communities beyond adaptation?

Doha, 28 November 2012 – For the world’s most vulnerable communities, loss and damage related to climate change is a reality today. A new study draws evidence of loss and damage from five case studies conducted in Bangladesh, Bhutan, The Gambia, Kenya, and Micronesia. The findings provide empirical insights into the limits of adaptation and the costs of unmitigated climate change. The study reveals that, in all five countries, affected communities suffered from loss and damage despite undertaking coping and adaptation measures. The report is presented by the UN University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) as a part of the Climate Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) Loss and Damage in Vulnerable Countries Initiative.

“Our findings reveal how communities cope with and adapt to climate change impacts. Above all we see that Loss and Damage is a reality today and the numbers are alarming. It is happening even though adaptation measures are taken: In Micronesia 92% of respondents were still experiencing adverse impacts, followed by 87% in Bhutan, 72% in Kenya, 70% in Bangladesh and 66% in The Gambia”, stated **Dr. Koko Warner, Scientific director, CDKN Loss and Damage in Vulnerable Countries Initiative, UN University** in Bonn. “The study also shows how highly sensitive to climatic disturbance these people are: 98.3 per cent base their livelihoods on farming and 83 per cent on livestock keeping (both median values). For 85 per cent of households surveyed, the main purpose of cultivating crops was for their own consumption. Only a median value of 10.9 per cent of surveyed HHs primarily engaged in cultivating crops for the purpose of selling. These bare figures are telling us that people are already at the margins of their survival”, Dr. Warner further explained.

Dr. Saleemul Huq, Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCAD) and Senior Fellow, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), elaborated further on Bangladesh, “81 per cent of the survey respondents reported high salinity levels in their soils, compared to only two per cent 20 years ago. Rice farmers have learned to adapt to increasing salinity in their soils until 2009 when cyclone Aila hit Bangladesh. In the two subsequent years, salinity levels were so high that rice yields were decimated. The total loss of rice harvest amounted to US\$1.9 million for just the four villages surveyed.” In this context Mr. Huq underscored that, “not all losses are quantifiable in dollars. For example in the case of Bangladesh, women have reported reproductive health problems and incidences of miscarriage. It is crucial that these non monetary costs are identified if they are to be considered by policy makers in climate negotiations.” he added.

At the UN Climate Change negotiations, speaking on behalf of the 48 countries in the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group, its Chair **Dr. Pa Ousman Jarju** stated, “This is also a climate justice issue. Countries that contribute least to global greenhouse emissions are the ones bearing the burden of loss and damage even though they have the most limited capacity to cope and adapt. This new report sheds light on the possibilities and constraints we face in our fight against climate change. Ignoring this knowledge can either mean our collective success or failure in stemming the pathways to loss and damage.

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UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY UNU-EHS Institute for Environment and Human Security	MCII Munich Climate Insurance Initiative	ICCAD International Centre for Climate Change and Development Independent University, Bangladesh in partnership with ICAS and IIED	CDKN

Sven Harmeling from **Germanwatch**, one of the consortium partners, stressed, "there will be no better time to take stock of loss and damage due to climate change; only worse times. The window to avoid catastrophic climate change is rapidly closing. At COP18, the global community should send a strong signal in three areas that it does not give in to climate change and leaves the vulnerable communities alone: first, agree to scale-up mitigation efforts immediately; second to substantially expand support for adaptation in vulnerable countries, including through dedicated funding for National Adaptation Plans in LDCs, and third to confront the remaining residual loss and damage. For the latter, the SBI Work Programme on Loss and Damage, including through its considerations of an international mechanism, should deliver concrete outcomes which provide the basis for an adequate response to loss and damage." Mr. **Harmeling** concluded.

Background

Loss and damage is already significant. Yet neither the literature on climate change nor on loss and damage fully reflects how climatic variables impact society and lead to loss and damage among households in vulnerable countries like Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States. Policymakers need better information, empirical data and analysis of both the challenges and the potential solutions. The current research brings new empirical evidence on loss and damage based on nearly 1800 household interviews and focus group and expert discussions with more than 200 individuals in the five countries. A broad range of both extreme weather events and slow onset climatic changes were assessed, including floods in Kenya, droughts in The Gambia, cyclones and salinity intrusion in Bangladesh, glacier retreat and changing rainfall patterns in Bhutan, and sea-level rise and coastal erosion in Micronesia.

About

The Loss and Damage in Vulnerable Countries Initiative was initiated by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and motivated by the need to understand more about this emerging issue. In order to move forward the debate on loss and damage for the benefit of the LDCs and other vulnerable countries, the GoB requested assistance from the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) to help build a common understanding around loss and damage and provide insight into what it entails for vulnerable countries. CDKN has appointed a consortium of organizations, which includes [Germanwatch](#), [United Nations University-Institute for Environmental and Human Security \(UNU-EHS\)](#), [International Centre for Climate Change and Development \(ICCCAD\)](#) and [Munich Climate Insurance Initiative \(MCII\)](#) to carry out this work.

Available information

- Policy report with case study findings and policy reflections
- Fact sheet (for media)
- Background / primer paper on loss and damage

All material available at: www.lossanddamage.net or visit us at the UN University booth in Doha!

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