

The ethical debate in Adaptation funding

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Abstract

Present-day need for adaptation to the risks of climate variability and change emerge as a result of previous actions perturbing the global climate system. Historically, these actions have resulted from anthropogenic activities largely concentrated in the developed nations while the impacts of these activities is felt most by those whose contribution to the problem has been negligible. Further, it is also well understood that differential potentials and capabilities exist across regions, communities, and individuals to cope with climate-induced changes. Difference in these i.e. vulnerabilities, adaptive capacities and historical emissions give rise to the issues of 'equity' and 'justice'. Hence, the whole issue of adaptation needs to be seen in a larger context based on the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and polluter pay.

Further, on equity grounds the issue adaptation is equally or may be more important than mitigation, but in the international climate debate the issue of adaptation has been marginalized to a large extent. According to Bali Action Plan released at COP 14 in 2007, Paragraph 1 (b) states that mitigation actions are supported by enabling means while same is not so for adaptation actions.

The developing country arguments are based on principles of 'polluter pays', 'historic responsibility' and 'common but differentiated responsibilities' and thus reiterate that "current citizens of industrialized countries should inherit the environment debts of their ancestors and pay for adaptation". Some of the developed countries disagree with such an approach and argue that the current generation did not participate in the decision-making of past generations, thus the current generation should not be responsible for something beyond their control. The 'Economies in Transition' have also brought in the principle of 'ability to pay' into the whole debate - e.g. Communist countries in the past have been heavy polluters, but may not be in a position to pay for historical pollution today. There are mixed opinion on the issue and though the need for enlarged adaptation funds has been reiterated at most of the important international climate forums but nothing substantial has been achieved. Thus the need to understand the underlying moral responsibility argument contained in the issue. This paper while recognizing the inadequacy of funds from retributive justice perspective will investigate some of the main ethical issues entailed by existing approaches for funding adaptation activities. The existing proposals for enlarged adaptation financing in the international climate negotiations and AWG text will be analyzed from ethical perspective.