

Damage done? NGOs highlight irreversible losses caused by climate change

Joint Report by CARE, Germanwatch, ActionAid and WWF warns against irreparable damage from climate change for ecosystems and vulnerable countries / UN climate conference in Bonn shows that countries still fail to deliver necessary action to prevent worst case scenarios

Bonn, May 24, 2012 - If global warming continues at its current pace, the planet will increasingly suffer irreversible damages to its biodiversity, natural resources and substantial losses of human life and territory according to a joint report published today by CARE International, Germanwatch, ActionAid and WWF at the Climate Change Conference in Bonn.

The joint report called "*Into Unknown Territory: The limits to adaptation and reality of loss and damage from climate impacts*" concludes that adaptation to climate change alone will no longer suffice. Governments will need to take new measures to deal with extreme impacts and prepare for losses due to climate change. Unless substantial efforts are taken immediately to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage climate resilient development, global warming could exceed 4 and even 6°C. The costs will place a massive burden even on industrialized countries, whilst massively increasing poverty and reversing development gains in poorer regions. The figures are staggering, conservative estimates show that we could risk around 2 trillion USD in economic and non-economic impacts worldwide by the year 2060 combined with potentially irreversible losses to ecosystems and biodiversity.

"The current political commitments do not match the urgent scientific realities", says Kit Vaughan, CARE International's Climate Change Advocacy Coordinator. Since global warming is set to exceed the critical threshold of 2 °C, consequently a range of new measures will have to be taken to reduce the worse impacts where possible. "We need urgent emissions reduction and increased support for climate adaptation. But when these measures fail," adds Vaughan, "we will have to start talking about compensation: How are poor countries going to be compensated for irreparable and irreversible losses caused by rising sea levels, desertification, loss of biodiversity or loss of territory?" Compensation is a matter of fairness and equity in our greenhouse, notes CARE's Vaughan. From its climate adaptation work in those regions most affected by climate change, the poverty-fighting organization finds that communities who have done so little to cause the problem are now faced with the negative effects of carbon-intensive lifestyles of those in wealthy nations.

The joint report was launched this Thursday in Bonn, where an inter-sessional Climate Change Conference preparing for the 18th Conference of the Parties this November in Doha, Qatar will be coming to an end this Friday. The starting round of the negotiations towards a new global climate change pact to be agreed by no later than 2015 demonstrated: "Vulnerable countries are highly threatened by loss and damage from climate change, their demands to immediately step up the ambition in climate protection towards those who have been most polluting must be responded to by the EU and other countries", urges Sven Harmeling, Germanwatch's Team Leader International Climate Policy. "The UNFCCC work programme to address loss and damage must result in decisive progress of the international community by COP18."

The report launched by the four organizations stresses the irreversibility of a changing climate: "Once the loss and damage happens, there is no turning back the clock", says Sandeep Chamling Rai, Senior Advisor- Adaptation Policy, WWF International. "We cannot pay our way out of losses in biodiversity and the overall ecosystem and its services. When it's gone - it's gone." The four organizations equally warn that the fast pace of climate change is increasingly exacerbating natural disasters, food crises and even migration issues. "Again, it is smallholder farmers and other vulnerable communities that carry the largest burden without being responsible for the crisis", adds Harjeet Singh, the International Climate Adaptation Coordinator for ActionAid International. "They are on the frontline of increasing climate impacts and their land and livelihoods are already getting damaged. Delay in action due to endless discussions and politics will only make it worse when they need urgent support to reduce their risks."

The report concludes with a series of recommendations to policy makers to prepare for and manage losses and damages caused by climate change, amongst others:

- Decision-makers need to refocus their approaches, towards addressing vulnerabilities and building resilience and adaptive capacity, especially of the poorest and most vulnerable people, communities and ecosystems, recognising the need to prioritise women and girls who will be most severely impacted.
- Nations and whole regions need to better understand the potential scale of losses and damages and ways to address them. Developing countries need assistance for such assessments, e.g. regional risk management facilities, insurance and practical measures to reduce climate impacts.
- Building on existing architecture, such as the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) and the Cancun Adaptation Framework, climate-proofed disaster risk reduction needs to be massively scaled up through infusion of financial resources. It is crucial that the framework creates incentives for risk reduction through both mitigation and adaptation.
- In some cases the limits of adaptation are going to be surpassed. The international community, recognising the precautionary principle and the role of the UNFCCC, needs to discuss proposals for mechanisms which can address rehabilitation and compensation for damage and losses from climate impacts.
- The drivers of loss and damage must be tackled head on by shifting to low carbon development pathways globally. Developed countries must increase their ambition level to more than 40% emission reduction below 1990 levels by 2020 and at least 80-95% by 2050.
- Developed countries must take the lead in providing finance, technology and capacity building to assist developing countries to invest in adaptation and disaster risk reduction and to transition their development onto low carbon and climate resilient pathways.

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Notes to editors

Download the full report at <http://www.careclimatechange.org/publications/careclimate-change>

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