



Economic and Social Council

Climate change and development

Aide Memoire

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Background

The Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that global warming is unequivocally the result of human activities and that the consequences of global warming are worsening. Rising sea levels, more frequent and stronger storms, coastal erosion, reduction in biodiversity, melting of glacier and arctic ice, increased salinity in fresh water aquifers, and the increases in diseases such as malaria and dengue fever are among the multiple negative consequences of climate change cited in the IPCC report.

Climate change is not a far-off prospect. It is already happening. World temperatures have increased by around 0.7 degree Celsius since the advent of the industrial era – and the rate of increase is quickening. At the same time, given the inertia of climate change, its impact will continue to be felt into the next century, irrespective of the mitigation efforts that the international community will be able to mount in the near future. Even stringent mitigation measures will not materially affect average temperatures changes until the mid-2030s – and temperatures will not peak until 2050. Hence, during the first half of the 21st century the world will have to learn to live with the effects of climate change.

It will be the poor and the most vulnerable, who generally contributed least to climate change, that will suffer most from its negative effects. Climate change will make it more difficult to reach each of the MDGs. For instance, reduction in child mortality will be hampered by the spread of disease and the contamination of water supply. Food borne diseases are likely to increase as a result of warmer temperatures. Achieving universal primary school education and gender equality in secondary school attendance will be even more difficult to reach, as time spent by girls to fetch water, a main reason for failure to attending school, will increase even further. The number of environmental refugees and displaced persons will also grow and infrastructure will be more prone to damage by extreme weather events. While the exact transmission mechanisms from climate change to human development will vary across and within countries, it is clear that the fight against poverty and the fight against climate change are closely interrelated.

To ensure timely realization of the United Nations development agenda, countries therefore need to systematically include climate considerations into their development planning. Given the economic, social and environmental implications of climate change, the response to it has to be rooted in a comprehensive approach to sustainable development with equity, which recognizes the vulnerability of the poor, and the need of economic growth for poverty alleviation. Investment in adaptation and mitigation will be needed to strengthen the ability of the poor to cope with the

negative impacts of climate change. While it will not be possible to avert all negative impacts of climate change on development, they can be minimized by integrating adaptation measures into development planning. At the same time, it will require mitigation efforts to keep the maximum temperature increases around 2 degrees.

ECOSOC Special Event on Climate change and development

It is against this backdrop that the Economic and Social Council will devote a Special Event on how to tackle the interrelated challenge of climate change and development. The event is expected to contribute to the 2008 AMR, which will focus on Sustainable Development. It is anticipated that climate change will be part of the AMR discussions.

Following, the opening of the meeting by the President of ECOSOC, H.E. Ambassador Léo Mérorès and opening remarks by Mr. Sha Zukang, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, the first session will focus on "*Learning to cope with climate change*". The second session will focus on "*Reducing the world's carbon footprint*". Each session will start with presentations by leading experts and practitioners in the field of climate change and development. Following the presentations, participants will have the opportunity to engage in a discussion with Member States and other stakeholders. To facilitate a free exchange of views during the discussion, there will be no advance speakers' list and interventions should not exceed 3 minutes; prepared statements would be distributed, but reading them out would be discouraged.

a) Panel I – Learning to cope with climate change

The ability of the most vulnerable to cope with climate related shocks is constrained by their low incomes and limited access to formal insurance. Strategies adopted by the poor to adapt to climate change can have long-term negative consequences. For instance, when natural disasters such as a drought hit the poor often need to sell their productive assets to satisfy their basic needs, making their recovery more difficult. Strengthening their resilience should therefore be a priority.

Developing countries must be supported in mainstreaming adaptation to climate change within national policies. Efforts to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable groups of society should not only be narrowly focused on addressing specific effects of climate change. They should instead focus on strengthening the capability to cope with different changes related to climate change, enabling the poor to react more flexibly when climate related disasters strike. This will require investment in social protection and broad-based national development strategies. There also is a need to put the right infrastructure – not only physical but also institutional - into place. Multiple stakeholder, including scientists, policy makers, and communities should be involved, so that integrating climate considerations into development planning becomes a broad-based rather than a piecemeal effort.

b) Panel 2 - Reducing the world's carbon footprint

To put the world on a trajectory that avoids dangerous climate change where rapid reversals in human development and a drift towards irreversible ecological damage would become very difficult to avoid, significant and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will be needed. Such cuts in emissions would come with a high price tag, but the costs of the cuts are still lower than the costs of inaction.

The main challenge is to substantially reduce emissions in industrialised countries and to address the rapid growth of emissions in emerging economies by stimulating cleaner development choices while promoting sustainable development and poverty eradication. In the developed world, several countries have set ambitious targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions, but very few have put in place the energy policy reforms needed to achieve them. The international community will also have to find an answer to the carbon footprint of emerging economies, which is expanding rapidly in aggregate terms. While many developing economies are already developing and implementing national mitigation strategies, such efforts could be significantly expanded, if appropriate incentives are provided.

Policy responses

The right technology portfolio will be essential in meeting the adaptation and mitigation challenge. The good news is that many technologies have already proven successful in pilot projects. Pilot projects alone will however not be able to deliver the kind of transition to a cleaner low-carbon economy which is required. The key challenge is therefore to quickly develop effective policy frameworks and cooperation mechanisms to drastically scale-up technology transfer and cooperation. At the same time, more must be invested into the development of new technologies. A wide variety of national policies and instruments are available to Governments, including market based tools, to promote such investment.

Global investments in the magnitude of \$15 to \$20 trillion may be required over the next 20-25 years to place the world on a markedly different and sustainable energy trajectory. If investment choices are based on solid economic rationale and sound scientific evidence, valuing true costs, they can unlock huge potential. The General Assembly high-level event stressed the need to provide developing countries with additional resources for investment and capacity building.

The bulk of the investment will come from Governments and the private sector. Governments can make an important contribution by putting into place the right framework, for instance through the successful conclusion of the environmental goods and services negotiations. A successful conclusion of the current Doha Round can help increase access to adaptation and mitigation technologies and increase countries' abilities to invest in such technologies.

The central role of the business sector as a source of solutions on climate change is widely recognized. The private sector has the know how, technology and financial resources to help transform climate problems into business opportunities. Successfully engaging the business sector in adaptation and mitigation efforts will therefore be a *sine qua non*.

The deeper problem remains that the world lacks a clear, credible and long-term multilateral framework that charts a course for avoiding the worst effects of climate change. In the absence of a post 2012 agreement, key actors, including the business sector, will remain reluctant to commit large amounts of resources beyond the current timeframe of 2012.

Role of ECOSOC

During its 2008 high-level segment, ECOSOC has an opportunity to promote consensus on the international community's response to climate change. The Annual Ministerial Review will bring together Ministers of Finance, Development Planning and the Environment to discuss how to achieve sustainable development. This will provide an occasion to discuss how to integrate climate change into national development strategies and international policies. The thematic discussion, with

its focus on rural development, can examine the link between climate change, biofuels and food security. The Development Cooperation Forum can address the central questions of financing of climate change.

Possible questions for discussion

Possible questions:

- *Broad-based development strategies and social protection will be required to assist the most vulnerable to cope with the negative effects of climate change. What are the examples of best practices on mainstreaming climate change into national development strategies?*
- *Africa is likely to be the region most heavily affected by climate change: what are the short term and long-term measures which African LDCs should take to strengthen the ability of their citizens to cope with the negative effects of climate change. How should the international community assist?*
- *A technological revolution is needed to help prepare the world for the negative impact of climate change and to drastically reduce the world's carbon footprint. What role can technology transfer play in this regard?*
- *How can we best get business fully engaged in the fight against global warming? What kind of incentives and regulatory frameworks would facilitate its engagement?*
- *How can ECOSOC advance the interrelated goals around climate change and development?*

Participation

The meeting aims to provide a forum for an interactive dialogue between policy-makers, experts, practitioners and the United Nations stakeholders. More information, including the agenda of the meeting, is available at <http://www.un.org/ecosoc/newfunct/climatechange.shtml>.

Contact for further information

For further information on the event, please contact Mr. Alberto Padova, Deputy Chief, Policy Coordination Branch or write to ecosocinfo@un.org. For question regarding civil society participation, please contact Ms. Hanifa Mezoui, Chief NGO Section.