



## **Adaptation and Development: Whose Goals and Priorities Count?**

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## Adaptation and Development: Whose Goals and Priorities Count?

It has been argued that adaptation to climate change should be integrated with development activities, and that it is time to pursue its ‘mainstreaming’ within such programmes (Burton 2009). Though, in principle, this would seem to be a crucially important step to take, in order to ensure that adaptation is not a mere afterthought, left for a time at which all other goals have been achieved, the proposal should be considered with some caution. One potential problem that has been noted is that decision-makers may welcome the combination of adaptation and development as a way to avoid assigning substantial new resources to adaptation (Huq and Reid 2009). Moreover, current developmental frameworks might become unsustainable given the magnitude and the dynamics of climatic changes, which could impede sustainable development efforts (Heyd and Brooks 2009).

There are also more fundamental problems to consider, however, since the impact of development on the poor often has been and is problematic because, all too often, development has favoured those who are already relatively better off. This is because the latter have greater capacity to absorb aid, be it technological innovation, financial incentives or educational opportunities. This pattern, unfortunately, reappears when the focus is on development with a focus on adaptation (see e.g., Kates 2009). It has been pointed out, for example, that the development of infrastructures, such as water reservoirs for electricity generation or irrigation, promoted in the name of adaptation to climate change, may bring about a net decrease in well-being to local rural populations, who bear the brunt of flooded valleys and interference in traditional livelihoods, while benefitting relatively distant (generally urban) populations.

In the past it has been assumed that these types of unfortunate mishaps in the delivery of development can, and should, be corrected by more closely targeting the least well-off for the kinds of changes from which they can authentically benefit. It will be argued here from the perspective of human security, with support from Amartya Sen’s capability approach, that these impacts on the poor may be understood, at least partially, as a result of neglect for the fundamental capability of self-determination and agency (Sen 1985, 1993; Clark 2006). From this perspective, even if development succeeds in the delivery of a certain goods (such as satisfaction of basic needs, improved incomes, health, security, and so on) it remains problematic if it is carried out without consideration of capabilities for self-determination of those affected.

Hence, even development that claims to take a ‘participatory’ approach may be subject to critique if participation is mere tokenism and decisions are made without, at least, the informed, voluntary endorsement of those affected. From this vantage point, couplings of adaptation to development should seek to preserve and enhance capabilities for self-determination. Ideally action on adaptation should not only be agreeable to those affected, but guided by endogenously arrived at goals and priorities insofar as possible, which is why local preferences for adaptation need to be considered (Mustelin et al. 2009).

We propose, therefore, that endogenous-led adaptation is superior to its alternatives in at least two ways. First, endogenous-led, adaptation as such already constitutes an achievement in human security since it exemplifies the crucially important capability for self-determination. Second, endogenous-led adaptation is more successful in increasing resilience than other approaches. This paper will illustrate this by reference to a case of adaptation to landslide hazards based on endogenously generated social capital (Aldunce et al. forthcoming). We conclude that the goals and priorities of those who are affected the most should especially be taken into account, and that a focus on the capability for self-determination is fundamental in the pursuit of human security in the context of adaptation.

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