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Confronting the Challenge of Climate Change: CARE's Adaptation Learning Program for Africa

Perhaps nowhere on the planet are people more vulnerable to climate change than in sub-Saharan Africa. CARE's Adaptation Learning Program for Africa is responding to this challenge. Its overarching goal is to reduce the negative impacts of climate variability and change on especially vulnerable households and social groups.

Background

The majority of people in sub-Saharan Africa depend on the land to make a living, and many are already perched on the brink of disaster.¹ Historically, the continent has been prone to drought, floods, and cyclones — all of which appear to be increasing in frequency and intensity. This is decimating many communities whose economies rest on agriculture, livestock or fisheries. In addition to these challenges, people in many sub-Saharan countries contend with poor governance, protracted conflicts, inequitable land rights and distribution, widespread environmental degradation and HIV and AIDS. Each of these factors undermines people's adaptive capacity.²

Climate change scenarios for Africa present a bleak picture for the future. As agricultural seasons shorten and the amount of arable land shrinks, crop yields in some countries may decline up to 50 percent by 2020. Crop revenues may decrease up to 90 percent by 2100. This poses a serious threat to the income

and food security of smallholder farmers and their families. In addition, rising sea levels coastal settlements while higher water temperatures, salinity and pH levels threaten their fishery-based economies. The number of Africans affected by water scarcity is projected to double from 300 million in 1990 to 600 million by 2025. Climate change will be directly responsible for up to 250 million of this total. Food and water shortages, as well as changes in transmission patterns of certain diseases (such as malaria), will have negative impacts on health.³ These changes are likely to increase migration and may trigger conflicts as desperate masses of people search for new homes. In short, climate change represents a daunting challenge to Africa's development aspirations.

Recent community-level research conducted by CARE in Africa indicates that poor people are acutely aware of climate change and its consequences for their lives. In Mozambique's Inhambane Province, for example, farmers are no longer able to predict when the rains will arrive. Harvests are declining — and hunger is increasing — as a direct result. Meanwhile, in Niger's Maradi Region, unreliable rains and recurrent drought are undermining the economic viability of agro-pastoral communities. Catastrophic floods in northern Ghana, like those experienced earlier this year, are projected to increase in frequency and intensity over time.

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In each of these countries, rural communities working with CARE have identified climate-related factors as the greatest challenge to their livelihoods and prospects for overcoming poverty.

The Program

To address the challenges posed by climate change, CARE is initiating an Adaptation Learning Program (ALP) for Africa in 2008. This will be a five-year program targeting countries where the impacts of climate change are projected to be particularly high. Research and program development have already begun in Mozambique, Ghana and Niger.

The ALP will consist of the following four inter-related components:

Community-based Adaptation Projects

Poor people are especially vulnerable to climate change due to the sensitivity of their livelihoods and the extensive constraints – such as low levels of formal schooling and political marginalisation – that frame their adaptive capacity. A robust response to climate change has to challenge entrenched inequities and discriminatory power structures if we are to ensure that everyone can

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Harvests are already declining in Mozambique.

access the information, resources and support necessary for adaptation. This implies that action at the grassroots, as well as higher levels, is critical.

The ALP's main thrust will be to implement model community-based adaptation (CBA) projects in some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries. The architecture of these projects will reflect CARE's approach to adaptation. Activities will encompass disaster risk reduction, making livelihoods more resilient to climate variability and change, the strengthening of local organisational capacity and social mobilisation. Project specificities are being designed with local stakeholders.

Tools and Methodologies

Using the ALP as a real-world test-bed, CARE will continue developing tools and methodologies to facilitate effective community-based adaptation. We will concentrate on refining our Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (CVCA) tool, as well as innovating new techniques to monitor change in local adaptive capacity, assess the quantitative costs and benefits of CBA activities, and dialogue with local stakeholders about climate change.

Informing Policymakers

Recognising the key role that national policies play in facilitating or constraining local-level adaptation efforts, the ALP will engage with policymakers at national and regional levels. Special support will be given to stakeholders involved in the preparation and implementation of National Adaptation Programs of Action (NAPAs) in order to strengthen linkages between these macro-level plans and conditions at the grassroots.

Learning and Sharing Knowledge

The ALP takes advantage of lessons learnt from other CBA projects. Nonetheless, a lot of learning clearly remains. Therefore, the ALP has been purposefully designed to maximise learning – as well as sharing – with CARE's national and international partners. One way of sharing will be through the CARE-in-Africa and careclimatechange.org websites.

Notes

- ¹ CARE International UK report "Living on the Edge," London UK October 3, 2006,
- ² Background Paper on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change in Africa for the African Workshop on Adaptation. Implementation of Decision 1/CP.10 of the UNFCCC. Accra, Ghana, 21-23 September 2006. Commissioned by the UNFCCC Secretariat.
- ³ Boko, M., I. Niang, A. Nyong, C. Vogel, A. Githeko, M. Medany, B. Osman-Elasha, R. Tabo and P. Yanda, 2007: Africa. Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, J.P. Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, Eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 433-467.