



**Simon Maxwell**

**'Climate change needs to infect development thinking. By the same token, development needs to infect climate change thinking. And both need values ...'**

## A triple call on climate change

**O**DI has launched a new meetings series on climate change, asking about the trade-offs and complementarities between climate change and poverty reduction. The discussions can be framed as three 'calls': a call to act; a call to collaborate; and a call to values.

### A call to act

The call to act is directed to all those in the field of international development who do not currently work on climate change. Nobody can stand aside from this issue. It requires the combined multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary attention of every one of us – urban and rural, national and international, development and humanitarian. Our urgent priority is to mainstream action on climate change. Attempts to mainstream gender or poverty have shown us how difficult this can be. The lessons from those experiences need to be learned.

Why can't we stand aside? Because holding carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to 450 or 500 parts per million, and temperature rise to 2 degrees, will be a massive task. By 2050, the average carbon 'ration' per person on the planet will be 2 tons per year. This compares with a figure for the US today of 20 tons, for the UK of 10 tons, for China of 5 tons and for India of 2 tons. Only the very poorest countries fall below the threshold – Ethiopia, for example, emits only 0.1 tons per person per year, one hundredth of the level of the UK. The richer countries need to reduce their carbon emissions by at least 80%. The world as a whole needs to reduce emissions by half. It is impossible to imagine this being done without paradigm-shifting changes in technology, pricing and social organisation. With rising population, the load cannot be carried by developed countries alone. All must play their part in mitigation. All will have to adapt to higher temperatures.

Whether we are talking about adaptation to the reality of climate change, or mitigation to address the root causes, both require a long-term perspective. It may or may not be true that contemporary natural disasters are climate-related, but the worst effects are still to come. In the meantime, economies are changing. For example, the world's population will rise by 1.45 billion people between 2005 and 2025, of whom 1.3 billion will live in towns and cities in developing countries. Planning growth and

resilience for the long term requires a clear-sighted vision of the climate-change resilient city of the future. We should not be afraid of scenario-planning: the very nature of development, after all, is long-term transformation.

In the short-term, the biggest impact on poor people is less likely to be climate than policies adopted to mitigate climate change. ODI research shows that attempts to reduce deforestation can disrupt the livelihoods of 400 million people around the world who depend on forest resources. Similarly, the rush to biofuels in the US and the EU contributed at least 25% to the rise in food prices which caused such turmoil in 2007. Not surprising, when the US alone consumed 80 million tons of maize to produce bio-ethanol.

Mainstreaming needs to infuse every part of development thinking. Countries and aid agencies will need to ensure that climate change continues to have a high profile and exhort planners to think through the implications. Exhortation is unlikely to be sufficient, however. Compliance procedures will be necessary, similar to environmental impact assessments. And regulation will be needed to establish forward prices for carbon.

### A call to collaborate

Climate change needs to infect development thinking. But by the same token, development needs to infect climate change thinking. Mitigation and adaptation are becoming specialist disciplines, with professional climate change negotiators locked into a sequence of meetings – from Kyoto to Bali to Poznan to Copenhagen. The professionals need to look out of the window and open the door: they need the specialist skills of development disciplines.

Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation? Highly necessary, since forest destruction contributes 18% of global carbon emissions. Climate change negotiators should work to protect forests. But they need development people to understand the politics and institutional complexities of forest tenure and forest management in often fragile developing countries; and development people to map the complex livelihoods of forest-dependent people.

Biofuels? Yes, but not at the expense of either the nutrition status of the poorest, or of virgin forest cut down to make space for palm oil plantations. Development specialists under-

### Overseas Development Institute

ODI is the UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues.

**ODI Opinions** are signed pieces by ODI researchers on current development and humanitarian topics.

This and other ODI Opinions are available from [www.odi.org.uk](http://www.odi.org.uk)

stand about the impact of trade rules on production incentives in different countries, and about how demand shifts will impact on prices.

New financing mechanisms? Highly desirable, and especially important if the need for additional funding is not to crowd out traditional development aid. UNDP estimated last year that adaptation alone could cost \$ 86 billion a year by 2015. But, please, let's avoid the frenzied creation of new funding mechanisms, which has resulted in 14 new environmental funds being established in the past 18 months. The current aid orthodoxy favours simplification, encouraging country ownership, and channelling funding wherever possible to the core budgets of developing countries. The 'Paris Principles' rule, and the Accra Agenda for Action provides the road map. Climate negotiators take heed.

And the negotiation framework? For development specialists, climate change negotiations are just the latest in a long series – the law of the sea, nuclear non-proliferation, above all international trade. How can trust be built at an early stage? How can negotiations be structured to ensure representativeness and accountability? What kinds of financial and non-financial incentives swing deals? How can the temptation to abandon multilateral processes and strike out bilaterally be avoided?

The message to the climate change community from the development community is clear: you need us; you know where to find us; we want to help.

### A call to values

Finally, action on climate change will be contested and highly political, at national level and internationally. There will be winners as well as losers, not least between the generations. Decision-making needs to be principled – and principled decision-making needs principles. What are they?

Environmental sustainability on its own is not sufficient. People's welfare is at stake and social justice is in

play. Douglas Alexander, the UK's Secretary of State for International Development, has talked of global social justice, a useful paradigm for climate change. Building on UK discourse, that could mean four things:

- Equal citizenship and equal rights;
- Equal opportunities;
- A social minimum; and
- Reasonable equity in outcomes.

This is a challenging agenda. It puts human rights and human development squarely at the centre of the discussion. It insists on legally binding frameworks and accountabilities. It imposes obligations to increase the level of social protection, especially in the face of climate-induced natural disasters. And it emphasises equity in outcomes, so that the historic polluters in rich countries do not bank all the gains and exclude poor people and poor countries.

All these values are central to development, familiar from our work on poverty, human development and capabilities. They play well to current preoccupations with partnership, accountability and voice.

They provide a template within which the poor can exercise their voice. And within which we can exercise ours.

Written by Simon Maxwell, ODI Director  
([s.maxwell@odi.org.uk](mailto:s.maxwell@odi.org.uk)).



Overseas Development  
Institute

111 Westminster Bridge  
Road, London SE1 7JD

Tel +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Fax +44 (0)20 7922 0399

Email  
[publications@odi.org.uk](mailto:publications@odi.org.uk)

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material from ODI Opinions for their own publications, but as copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication.

© Overseas Development  
Institute 2009

ISSN 1756-7629

### Useful links and references

ODI climate change events series, <http://www.odi.org.uk/events/series-details.asp?id=65&title=climate-change-international-development>

ODI Climate change, forests and environment programme, <http://www.odi.org.uk/ccef/index.html>

ODI 'Food' theme page, <http://www.odi.org.uk/themes/food/index.asp>

ODI 'Rights' theme page, <http://www.odi.org.uk/themes/rights/default.asp>

ODI 'Social Protection' theme page, <http://www.odi.org.uk/themes/social-protection/index.asp>

ODI 'Trade' theme page, <http://www.odi.org.uk/themes/trade/index.html>

ODI on... Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Accra 2008, <http://www.odi.org.uk/odi-on/accra2008/index.asp>

Bird, N. and Peskett, L. (2008) 'Recent bilateral initiatives for climate financing', ODI Opinion 112. London: ODI.

Brown, D. and Bird, N. (2008) 'The REDD road to

Copenhagen: Readiness for what? ODI Opinion 118. London: ODI.

Foresti, M. and Sharma, B. (2007) 'Voice for accountability: Citizens, the state and realistic governance', ODI Briefing Paper 31. London: ODI.

Maxwell, S. (2008) 'Global social justice as a new focus for development policy?', ODI Opinion 96. London: ODI

Nicol, A. and Kaur, N. (2008) 'Climate change: getting adaptation right', ODI Opinion 116. London: ODI

Peskett, L. et al. (2007) 'Biofuels, agriculture and poverty reduction', Natural Resource Perspectives 107. London: ODI

Stern, N. (2008) 'Key elements of a global deal on climate change'. London: London School of Economics and Political Science