

# Africa after the Africa Commission: What Priorities for the German G8?



## Working Group Report

### Climate Change

Tom Mitchell, in the chair, introduced the meeting by summarising the events of the past G8 communique at Gleneagles in 2005, which called for the need to slow, reverse and make substantial cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. It also called for some specific actions to work with a range of organisations and countries on clean energy and other related areas, but offered no clear rhetoric on climate change adaptation options.

Tom stated that the rhetoric of climate change also talks of a perpetual disaster for Africa. But, he said, conditions may get better for some and using this possibility may provide a better starting point for making climate change adaptation an integral part of the development agenda.

#### John Magrath

John began by stating that he does not see the problems associated with climate change as strictly related to climate change but more to increasing variability, i.e. changes in existing local environment. This means that climate change can not be separated from other environmental stresses that are being discussed.

The major issue, as John sees it, is that climate change is having a real impact on livelihoods. He sees these as serious and believes there is a danger of crossing climatic thresholds, past which the changes cannot be reversed. As an example, John looked at the changes being seen by farmers, with greater extremes in temperature and precipitation, changes in growing seasons and increasing unpredictability. This makes it harder for them to plan and prepare. He continued by outlining ways in which farmers are adapting to this unpredictability, through changing crops, planting times. He noted, however, that it is easier to adapt for the better off than poor people, as they have better access to education, money, knowledge and higher expectations.

John argued that adaptation is not just about farmers coping, there are many mechanisms in which people in Africa will do this, including migration, labour markets and others. He believes that responses to climate change need to maximise flexibility – climate change is not an excuse not to tackle poverty – in fact, quite the opposite. Public services and safety nets are very important in helping people cope with increasing vulnerability.

John finished by outlining some key areas of importance and opportunity for climate change and development policy-making: agriculture; water food storage; weather forecasts (and communication of these); energy, the support of a pastoralist economy; and drought/disaster planning and relief.

He also outlined constraints for policy-making, including poverty, choosing priorities and creating capacity for action and the need for co-operation.

As a final point, John stated a belief that climate change adaptation is more a subject for justice than for aid. If Northern countries are responsible for a changing climate and Africa will deal with the consequences, there is a strong argument that the “polluters pay”.

### **Henny Osbahr**

Henny presented research from the ADAPTIVE Project, looking at how diversity can create opportunities. This sought to understand patterns in response strategies – who bears what risks and how do these lead to different livelihoods responses.

The project found that there was a need for improved tools to carry out climate change data analysis and recognise how changes in the climate can lead to changes in livelihoods and common forms of response at a local level. Some other needs found were:

- Better assessment of resilience;
- Reinforcement of support networks and flexible organisation;
- Promotion of multi-level institutional involvement in initiatives;
- Development of special themed projects;
- Improve communication;
- Better understanding of heterogeneity of stakeholders at a local level

Henny concluded by arguing that this showed a need for supporting integrated action on adaptation to climate change.

### **Discussion**

Some points raised in the discussion included:

- There is a need for headline grabbing messages to feed into the G8 but these are difficult to create, due to the complexity of options available;
- Little information around the potential effects of climate change or how to deal with them are disseminated to the ground level, and many could benefit from better provision in this regard. There was a recommendation to use national Meteorological services to provide better climatic information;
- How to fund adaptation and in particular, the idea of justice as opposed to aid for adaptation. Does this mean that the funding of adaptation would be separate to existing aid mechanisms? If so, how much would it cost and how exactly would it be funded? Is it politically viable? There was also discussion about whether adaptation funding should be channelled through communities or at a national level;
- The effect migration, as a response to climate change, could have on the world – it is already an acutely politicised issue and could be even more so in future. The question was asked: “Do we encourage people to stay or help them move elsewhere?”;
- There was some agreement that the G8 need to act to meet existing commitments to mitigation promises in order to be able to interact with African leaders on adaptation.