
THE POLITICS AND BUSINESS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

3. ADAPTATION:

Many developed nations are a century or more behind in adapting to climate change -- study

Lisa Friedman, E&E reporter

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Without significant new investment, it will take the poverty-stricken West African nation of Mali more than 250 years to be as prepared for climate change as wealthy Western nations. Indonesia, which has been moving steadily up the global economic ranks, is still 122 years away from that goal. And the Philippines, rocked last month by Typhoon Haiyan and still far from recovery, won't be as climate-ready as rich countries for another 48 years.

The figures are part of a sweeping new ranking released yesterday by the University of Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index (ND-GAIN), which examined data from 175 countries going back to 1995 to understand the nations' long-term vulnerability to droughts, storm surges and other extreme weather events made more common because of climate change.

"For the low-income countries to catch up to where the developed countries are now is crucial," said Jessica Hellmann, an associate professor at Notre Dame. "We need to bend the curve, and we can't wait a hundred years."

On average, the organization found, poor countries are about a century away from rich countries in their ability to withstand the impacts of climate change.

The annual ranking is largely focused on helping the private sector decide the best places to invest in adaptation, by measuring countries' vulnerability to climate change as well as their ability to improve their resilience. The numbers are arrived at by combining the data with a range of other factors, from dependence on imported food to life expectancy.

At a meeting earlier this week, Dave Gustafson, a senior fellow at Monsanto Co., called it an "extremely valuable tool for helping to direct companies like ours ... to know where they ought to be operating to make a difference." Gustafson, who leads the agricultural giant's environmental modeling, said a better understanding of global data has helped spark work in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia on water infrastructure and other projects.

According to the ND-GAIN index, the countries best prepared to deal with climate change are Australia, Finland, Norway, Switzerland and Denmark. Among the least ready to adapt: South Korea, Afghanistan, Burundi, the Central African Republic and Eritrea.

How to fill the Green Climate Fund?

The disparities between rich and poor countries have long been known. But, Hellmann said, just how far behind many of the poorest nations were in being able to withstand disasters came as a surprise.

And, she noted, while economic development on a broad scale will certainly help countries become better prepared for climate change, "by focusing on what key adaptive capacity certain countries are lacking ... we can speed that up more directly." At the same time, she noted, the data also show that even wealthy countries are not moving fast enough to improve their adaptive capacity.

The findings come as nations are building up the Green Climate Fund to manage potentially billions of dollars annually in climate change assistance. Wealthy nations have vowed to raise \$100 billion annually by 2020 in public and private funds, some portion of which will be doled out through the Green Climate Fund.

A key fight in the future will be how much of that money comes from the private sector -- a source environmental groups and a number of developing countries have met with skepticism. Policymakers also have downplayed the role the private sector will play in adaptation, noting that will likely be an area in which companies are unlikely to undertake research.

Joyce Coffee, managing director of the Global Adaptation Institute, disagreed and said she already sees the private sector

working to understand the risks that businesses face because of climate change and ways to work in the adaptation space. They might refer to it as risk mitigation or business continuity planning, she noted, adding, "If they are using different words, the climate adapters need to come to their terms."

"The private sector is the key of innovation," Coffee said. "Innovation is absolutely how we're going to solve the climate question."

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