

## WRI FACT SHEET

# The Role of Adaptation in U.S. Climate Legislation and an International Climate Agreement

**Developed and developing countries are now grappling with ways to slow greenhouse gas emissions, but global warming is already causing more severe storms, unpredictable planting seasons, and melting glaciers around the world. Adaptation means learning to live with these changes — and preparing for other changes that are unavoidable — in order to minimize harm from climate change impacts.**

**A**s Congress debates climate legislation in the United States, a financial commitment to funding adaptation in developing countries is critical to achieving a global climate agreement. This agreement, likely in the form of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, will protect the United States and all countries from global warming damages. Enactment of cap-and-trade legislation will signal U.S. commitment to the agreement and create a new source of revenue to fund adaptation. A signal of support by the United States will help advance the multi-year international climate negotiations culminating in Copenhagen this December.

***“Vulnerable countries ... must be supported in our efforts to adapt to a phenomena caused by others. This will require a fraction of the trillions mobilized in short order to address the global financial crisis.”***

— Denis Lowe, environment minister for Barbados

## **Why congressional commitment to adaptation is important:**

- A commitment to adaptation in a U.S. climate bill is critical to getting other countries to act on a global climate deal. Just as the United States won't act on a global deal without commitments from other major emitting countries, the global community is looking for a signal that the United States is

serious about climate change. In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, climate change legislation must include a clear legislative commitment to assist those developing countries who will require humanitarian and other support.

- Adaptation funding is national security funding. In 2007, eleven retired three-star and four-star admirals and generals recommended that “The U.S. should commit to global partnerships that help less developed nations build the capacity and resiliency to better manage climate impacts.”<sup>1</sup> Competition for scarcer resources and increased migration — two possible outcomes of climate change — can breed instability in volatile regions. Adaptation funding can lessen these threats.

***“Military planning should view climate change as a threat to the balance of energy access, water supplies, and a healthy environment, and it should require a response. Responding after the fact with troops—after a crisis occurs—is one kind of response. Working to delay these changes—to accommodate a balance among these staples—is, of course, another way.”***

— General Paul J. Kern (Ret.)

1. *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change*, 2007.

- The United States has a moral responsibility to fund adaptation. The world needs the United States to provide leadership in helping poor countries adapt. The poorest countries — those that have contributed least to the causes of global warming — are most vulnerable to climate change, and likely to face its harshest effects. As the world's largest historical emitter of greenhouse gases, the United States has a responsibility to do its share to help those who may suffer because of climate change.

***“Although the federal government must guide the policy toward a future with climate protection, the decisions that need to be made are not primarily political, they are spiritual and moral”***

— Rev. Jim Ball, Ph.D., President & CEO,  
Evangelical Environmental Network

#### **WHY CAP-AND-TRADE LEGISLATION IS A PREFERRED SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR INTERNATIONAL ADAPTATION:**

- Using emissions allowances under a cap-and-trade program would create a new source of revenue to fund adaptation, rather than drawing on tax revenues.
- As funding would come from a new market, it would be genuinely new funding — over and above existing development assistance. This “additionality” is important in the international climate arena and responds to the fact that climate damage is creating a new threat to development, beyond the poverty that already exists.
- Funding from a cap-and-trade system would be predictable, consistent, long-term, and subject to careful monitoring. This would help to assure that recipient countries can plan effectively and use U.S. funding wisely.

#### **ASSURING THAT ADAPTATION ASSISTANCE IS SPENT WISELY**

A robust monitoring and evaluation program is essential to the success in adaptation. Fortunately, there is a shared set of core adaptation functions that all countries will need to perform, including climate information management, risk assessment, and coordination of activities across sectors. Growing understanding of these functions provides a basis for effective monitoring and evaluation.

Moreover, the United States and its global partners have learned important lessons over the years regarding what makes foreign aid work well. These “aid effectiveness” findings have tremendous relevance to adaptation and can be incorporated into the design of initiatives.

#### **How adaptation assistance would work:**

As the climate changes, developing countries will need to make many changes, including new agricultural practices, water management practices, and approaches to managing forests and fisheries. In many places, cities will need stronger protection from storms and new sources of clean drinking water. Making these changes — and many others — requires substantial resources that poor countries do not have, as well as technical know-how and policy reform.

USAID, NOAA, the World Bank, and the Global Environment Facility all have small programs up and running that support adaptation activities. These programs are all limited in scope, but provide important lessons to draw upon as the world works to scale up adaptation efforts to meet the growing need. Policy-makers might consider a combination of bilateral and multilateral options for supporting adaptation, in order to draw on the strengths of these different approaches.

#### **SUPPORT FOR ADAPTATION ASSISTANCE IS STRONG:**

Using a cap-and-trade system to fund adaptation is an idea supported by both the environmental community and the business community. The United States Climate Action Partnership, a group of leading businesses and environmental groups made a specific recommendation in its 2009 Blueprint for Legislative Action on adaptation:

*“Congress and the Administration should establish a U.S. climate policy that strengthens support for efforts by developing countries for the adaptation of human and natural systems to the impacts of climate change.”*

For more information on the World Resources Institute's work to promote effective adaptation, please contact Heather McGray ([hmcgray@wri.org](mailto:hmcgray@wri.org)).