World Governments must commit to providing significant funds for climate change adaptation

Title

As high level government officials gather in Warsaw this week to discuss climate finance as part of global climate talks, the need to gather momentum for adaptation finance from public sources is high on the agenda.

See BirdLife's asks to the governments attending the talks.

While the world must do more to curb the emission of greenhouse gases, it must also do more, today, on adaptation. The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change emphasized that many impacts of climate change will persist for centuries, even if emissions of CO_2 are stopped today.

Funding for adaptation has been minimal, despite the pledge by developed nations in 2009 to “provide new and additional resources … approaching $30 billion for the period 2010–2012, with balanced allocation between adaptation and mitigation.” So far this “balanced allocation” is far from being achieved. Current public commitments to climate change finance have been dedicated in large parts to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. A number of studies indicate that less than 20% of climate aid currently goes to adaptation.

And yet the need for financing to help nations vulnerable to climate risks is far from being met and is expected to grow. As a rapidly changing climate continues to disrupt human lives, community safety and economic productivity, the need for action to help people cope while keeping natural systems resilient will only become more pressing.

“Investments in adaptation are urgently needed today to lessen impacts in the future” said Edward Perry, Climate Change Policy Officer at BirdLife International. ‘‘It is clear that vulnerable people and the ecosystems upon which they depend are already suffering the effects of climate change – dramatically scaling up finance to support the development and implementation of robust national adaptation planning is critical.”

Calls for addressing loss and damage associated with climate change have been a focus during this latest round of climate talks. “Action to address loss and damage from climate change should advance risk reduction and increase resilience as a priority. It’s therefore vital to not lose sight of the urgent need for more investment in adaptation,” said Imen Meliane, Director of International Adaptation Policy at The Nature Conservancy. “It’s important to apply the lessons learned from the disaster community, which was previously focused on disaster relief and recovery, but increasingly recognizes the importance of investing in preventive action - because it pays to do so.”

“Disaster risk reduction strategies are indeed beginning to gain traction with finance ministries as growing economic evidence demonstrates that investments in prevention have a real return on investment,” said Meliane. “We know from the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction that an investment of $1 dollar in prevention can avert about $10 in losses.”

“In order to effectively address the impacts of climate change, it is clear the Climate Convention needs to take a balanced approach to allocating resources between adaptation and mitigation, and this translates into an urgent need for significant increases in adaptation funding,” said Edmund Barrow, Head, Global Ecosystem Management Programme of IUCN. “These efforts should also be well coordinated with humanitarian and disaster response and planning efforts.”

This is a a joint statement with The Nature Conservancy, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and Wetlands International, at the United Nations global climate change conference "COP19" now underway in Warsaw, Poland.