

A Climate for Development

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A few months ago, Rwanda's President Paul Kagame stated explicitly that the continent's future depends on what comes out of the climate change negotiations.

He argued that Africa needs a strong climate deal, and quickly, so that global emissions can be brought under control as soon as possible. He also called for strong mechanisms to help the continent move towards a low carbon growth path and to strengthen its resilience to unavoidable impacts.

President Kagame hit the nail on the head.

We know that the effects of climate change will hit the poorest and most vulnerable first and hardest. That is why the new climate change deal so many are working so hard for must also be a deal for development.

Fighting poverty and protecting our planet must go hand-in-hand. Receding forests, expanding deserts, changing rainfall patterns, and rising sea levels trap people in hardship and undermine their future. Studies in Ethiopia show that children exposed to drought in early childhood are more likely to be malnourished five years later.

Because of climate change, it is estimated that up to 600 million more people in Africa could face malnutrition as agricultural systems break down; an additional 1.8 billion people could face water shortage, especially in Asia; and more than 70 million Bangladeshis, 22 million Vietnamese, and six million Egyptians could be affected by climate-related flooding. Worse, new scientific evidence indicates that ocean temperatures are rising to record levels. That will put further stress on coastal ecosystems and on the people depending on them for their survival.

Now is the time to push through both a vision and actions for a better, cleaner, and more sustainable world for us all.

We have only one planet to live on. We must ensure that the way we live and develop is consistent with keeping its ecosystems in balance. We must collectively find a different, more sustainable, way to grow our economies, and ensure that poor people and nations have the opportunity to create a better life for themselves.

While climate change presents great challenges, it also offers opportunities for us all to move towards sustainable development. If nations can make progress at the Copenhagen climate talks, that will lead to reductions in emissions; the development of less carbon-intensive production and consumption processes; directing climate financing to support global economic growth; and setting the world's poorer countries on inclusive and sustainable pathways out of poverty.

The climate change negotiations must, at a minimum, take the following three developing country imperatives into account.

First, developing countries must be able to develop and put in place what their citizens need for a decent life. Unless people have at least basic access to water, sanitation, food, and energy, as well as to institutions which work and a way to have a say in the decisions which affect their lives, they will not be able to cope with the additional burden of a changing climate.

Second, people in developing countries need targeted support to develop the capacity to adapt to climate change – from the poor farmer who wants to grow more resilient crops, to the family whose home must be able to withstand increased flooding. This means helping countries to put climate change adaptation at the heart of all their efforts to tackle poverty, with proper attention paid to the needs of more vulnerable groups, including women and indigenous people. Adaptation efforts must be flexible and resilient enough to navigate the challenges which climate change may pose in the future.

Third, developing countries need the support of partners to move along a low-carbon development pathway. They need better access to carbon financing to pay for that, and the skills to put that money to

work where it is needed. That includes driving private and public finance towards cleaner investments in energy, transport, and other infrastructure and in industry.

If developing countries are assisted in these ways, they will be able to contribute to global efforts to tackle climate change while also pursuing the development to which their people aspire.

Sealing a new climate change agreement will require unwavering political will, so that national interests do not obstruct achieving what is best for our planet as a whole. If the deal reached is also a deal for development, we could set the stage for future generations to live in greater peace and prosperity across our world. We need to invest up front now, to protect our climate and the lives of all of us and our descendants.

We know what needs to be done, and we know we collectively face choices. We can do nothing, or too little, or our world can take bold actions together to confront the climate change challenge.

This December, in Copenhagen, I hope we will, collectively, summon the courage to act.

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