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Justice and Equity in Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction

There is a need to bring together recent research from geographers, philosophers and beyond to address central challenges of justice and fairness in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation efforts. The analysis of how risks and responsibilities should be distributed informs wider discussions about how risk governance can be transformed according to certain normative ideals, how existing forms of governance compare, and how responsibility for financing should be shared to achieve equity, efficiency and additionality. Work by geographers on the ethics of climate change adaptation has used Rawlsian ideas of procedural and distributive justice and Sen's capabilities approach to specify how risk reduction policies could be implemented fairly and equitably as well as analyse current adaptation initiatives and perceptions of appropriate action by different actors. At the same time, more recent work in political theory has developed themes from Rawls in considerable detail, in order to develop more nuanced and practically relevant understandings of justice (e.g. Dworkin, 2000).

The following questions are central to this research agenda:

- What does justice require as the end goal of risk reduction efforts? Do the requirements of justice cohere with the requirements of efficiency and additionality? How might theories of justice better inform theories of resilience and transformation?
- How can limited funding be distributed justly, and who should bear the costs? Can universal principles govern funding criteria for different groups – should low-income groups bear less responsibility than vulnerable high-income groups, for example?
- How do normative criteria compare with analysis of how risks and responsibilities are being distributed in real-world programming? Is there a role for ethical principles in programme design, monitoring and evaluation?
- What role can and should normative principles play in international negotiations and legal frameworks? In addition to Sendai and adaptation processes at the UNFCCC, what do normative debates imply for the question of legal liabilities for loss and damage?

These issues were recently discussed at the UK Alliance for Disaster Reduction Research in the context of debate about climate change adaptation and equity. It was agreed all round that there was a need for further collaboration and research in this area.