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Climate justice in adaptation: The role of equity

Since the establishment of the UNFCCC in 1992, the concept of climate justice and equity has featured in global debates and action on climate change. For example, the SDGs are based on a 'leave no one behind' commitment, which is rooted in equity and justice (Clark, 2016). Notably, climate justice and equity is highlighted more in relation to mitigation as compared to adaptation.

Adaptation is critical in tackling climate change, as it addresses the immediate and long-term climate impacts. It is however a complex process, as it is multi-stakeholder, multi-scalar, cross-temporal and context specific. The influence of social, economic and political factors produces winners and losers (Pelling, 2010), necessitating consideration of equity within adaptation frameworks across policy and practice. Equitable adaptation ensures that all social groups are allocated adaptation benefits and costs, according to need. International adaptation policies already integrate equity within their frameworks. However, research on policy and practice at national and sub-national level demonstrates two things: a) that adaptation is potentially exacerbating social inequalities, thus negating adaptation gains; and b), that a consideration of equity in adaptation will be essential to ensure that some social groups are not left out of the adaptation process, as equitable adaptation is built on an understanding of social inequality and the causal factors of differential vulnerability.

The following research agenda on equity in adaptation is therefore proposed:

- a) Priority given to equity in adaptation policy and practice:** This research area will establish whether national and sub-national policy and practice consider equity to be an important for successful adaptation, thus preventing research (and international adaptation policy) from making assumptions that adaptation actors desire equity.
- b) Understanding of equity in adaptation policy and practice:** Relevant to contexts where equity is considered a priority for adaptation, this research area would establish how equity is conceptualized/understood across policy and practice. As equity is based on value judgement (Edvardsson et al., 2012), this agenda will provide insights into how adaptation actors in policy and practice perceive equity (including how equity can be achieved) and how the framings of equity evolve and dominate over others.
- c) Measurement of equity:** As adaptation attracts more resources, knowing whether adaptation actions are producing equitable outcomes and impacts through reduction of social inequalities is vital. Determining whether and how equity can be measured at different scales will contribute towards learning and design of new adaptation programs.

References

Clark, H., 2016. A commitment to leave no one behind: Equity in the SDGs. UNDP.
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Edvardsson et al., 2011. Five areas of value judgement in local adaptation to climate change.
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Pelling, 2010. *Adaptation to climate change: from resilience to transformation*. Routledge.