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Item Type	Preprint
Authors	Rock Ethics Institute
Publisher	Rock Ethics Institute, The Pennsylvania State University
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Download date	2026-06-19 14:53:48
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/175502

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Planning for adaptation to climate change raises ethical questions about the priorities: Examples from Tanzania

By [Rock Ethics Institute](#) on October 6, 2007 12:56 AM | [0 Comments](#) | [0 TrackBacks](#)

Climate change is predicted to have significant impacts on the economy and environmental resources in developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan countries such as Tanzania. Food production, water, infrastructure, settlements and health will all be affected by climatic changes such as more frequent and intense droughts and flooding. Certain groups will be more vulnerable to these impacts than others. National adaptation plans and policies will need to prioritize the needs of these groups.

Many Tanzanians depend on the natural environment for their subsistence and income, such as forests, which provide timber, non-timber forest products and charcoal. These resources may be impacted by climate change. Furthermore, low levels of health, nutrition, education and skills combine with low incomes and limited access to markets and technological alternatives to make poor people vulnerable to climate change.

Poor people in rural areas are already more vulnerable than their urban counterparts to shocks such as droughts and are likely to be more affected by climate change. Women, children and pastoralists are also particularly at risk because their access to resources and income-earning opportunities is more limited than that of many other groups.

The Strategic Assessment of Equity and Justice in Adaptation to Climate Change, produced by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of East Anglia in the UK, looked at what would help to make national adaptation plans and policies fair. Its key conclusion is that a fair process of adapting to climate change needs to prioritize groups that are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts.

Measures to help nations and people adapt to climate change will necessarily be complex. Many overlapping factors affect the impacts that climate change will have, as well as how people can adapt to them. In Tanzania, there are several predicted impacts:

- Increased droughts and flooding will decrease food production and access to clean water, thus impairing health.
- People will have to rely on coping mechanisms because of climate change impacts. For example, the use of forest resources for income may increase, pastoralists may migrate further and break up their households, and more children may be sent to work.
- These coping mechanisms will be used more as climate variability increases. This will have both environmental impacts, such as deforestation and soil erosion, and social impacts, such as children missing out on education.

Climate change will increase the pressure on vulnerable groups in Tanzania. Women, children, pastoralists, and rural dwellers in general will find their coping mechanisms stretched to the limit. Nutrition, health, education, and the environment can suffer as a result. This can in turn increase vulnerability because natural resources have been and still are a safety net during periods of stress. Fair adaptation means addressing the causes of vulnerability, not just its symptoms:

- The environmental resources that vulnerable people rely on must be maintained. The government of Tanzania does not have the capacity to manage resources such as water and forests centrally. It should involve local people, civil society groups and local government in co-managing environmental resources.
- To improve incomes, reduce dependence on risky agriculture, and decrease the risks



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associated with subsistence living, people will need better access to markets. This requires better communications and transport, as well as improved, corruption-free institutions.

- Improved health and education must support these other measures if vulnerable groups are to have a fair chance at participating in markets in a way that benefits them and assists them in adapting to climate change.

Setting adaptation priorities in developing countries such as Tanzania raises a host of issues about what justice requires. The study highlights that a package of mutually supportive and pragmatic measures fostering economic and human development rather than magic bullets are needed for fair adaptation to climate change.

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Funded by:

UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC); Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research

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