

## PUTTING A HUMAN FACE TO IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



Rising temperatures. Melting icecaps. Dying coral reefs.

The list of physical manifestations of greenhouse gas emissions that are discussed during climate talks tends to omit one vital component of the issue — the effect on human beings themselves.

This is according to Koko Warner, head of Environmental Migration, Social Vulnerability and Adaptation Section at the United Nations University's Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS).

As the lead author of a UNU-EHS report that documents the effects of climate change on communities and individuals across nine developing nations —

Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Kenya, Micronesia, Mozambique and Nepal — Warner believes that more attention needs to be paid at this micro level.

“We need research that looks at long-term, large-scale climate change but we also need the human face and local perspectives,” she tells *SciDev.Net*.

Using a combination of household surveys and interviews as well as meteorological and Geographic Information System (GIS) data, the report is the first investigation across several countries into the loss and damage inflicted by climate changes at a community level, she says.

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And the signs are not good: The overwhelming majority of individuals living in areas of shifting environments suffered significant losses to their livelihoods, even when adaptation measures had been taken, the report finds.

For example, in an Ethiopian community that adopted short- and long-term adaptation strategies for protection from flood, subsequent extreme events in the region still caused damage or complete destruction of 94 per cent of individual’s crops and 51 per cent of livestock, leading to hunger and stress.

This brings an “uncomfortable” question to the negotiations table, says Warner.

“What are we going to do if mitigation and adaptation are not enough?”

Indeed, the question of how to factor in loss and damage into any forthcoming outcomes has been receiving increasing attention among climate negotiators.

Earlier this week (12 November), a coalition of G77 nations and China recommended establishing an international mechanism that would deal with the loss and damage caused by extreme and slow-onset climate events, particularly in developing nations.

Along with assessing the climate risk countries face, and generating new knowledge to help them cope with climate impacts, the aim would be to support regeneration of communities and their environment that have been hit by climate shifts.

How this proposal is greeted by developed nations during the next ten days' discussion at COP19 will make or break its chances of appearing in a climate change deal, to be decided on in 2015 in Paris.

Source : <http://www.scidev.net/global/climate-change/scidev-net-at-large/putting-a-human-face-to-impacts-of-climate-change.html>