

Seminar of Governmental Experts (16-17 May 2005)

Supporting material* for the presentation by Finland on behalf of the European Community and its Member States

Adaptation and sustainable development

1. Addressing climate change is an integral part of sustainable development

Climate change and its adverse physical effects further impact social and economic development prospects of nations and the livelihoods of individual households. Therefore, addressing climate change should be part and parcel of national sustainable development policies.

2. Examples of inter-linkages between climate change, poverty alleviation and sustainable development

The themes of this year's session of the Commission on Sustainable Development were access to water and sanitation and sustainable human settlements development. Any one of these themes can be used as an example of issues for which climate change considerations are highly relevant and of inter-linkages between climate change, poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

Climate change is expected to increase water scarcity in already water-stressed areas. In some other areas, an increased risk of floods has to be considered in the design of low-cost sanitation options. Furthermore, poor, and thereby vulnerable, population groups frequently live in areas prone to flooding, landslides and other disasters, because these are the areas where the land has the lowest commercial value. Climate change may increase the risks of living in such areas and make the position of the inhabitants even more precarious. These examples clearly show that overlooking climate-related risks will lead to higher adaptation needs and costs later and endanger the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

3. Urgency in addressing the problem

Climate change is already occurring. The IPCC TAR concluded that the Earth's climate system has demonstrably changed on both global and regional scales since the pre-industrial era. The assessment "Impacts of Europe's changing climate" draws a harsh conclusion for Europe: "In order to prevent severe damage to the environment and society, and to ensure sustainable development even under changing climate conditions, adaptation strategies are required". Another example comes from the North: the Arctic Council noted last November that the impacts documented by the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) are already felt

* this paper does not reflect a formal EU position but is intended as a contribution to the debate

throughout the region and endorsed the conclusion that continued adaptation is needed.

Therefore, intelligent development policies should take into account the impacts of climate change through planned adaptation. Such development policies should also incorporate understanding of inter-linkages between adaptation and mitigation efforts: the more successful global mitigation efforts are, the less need there is to adapt and the longer the time scale before the limits to adaptation are reached. Thus, the feasibility of adaptation strategies depends to a large extent on the level of mitigation.

4. Opportunities

Integration of climate change aspects into sustainable development policies and into local, sub-national, national and sectoral decision-making, including investment, enables governments to address the problem cost effectively and at the scale required. It also helps to ensure that duplication of efforts and waste of scarce resources is avoided. Rather than building two bridges - first a "business-as-usual" bridge and then another one to adapt to climate change - only one bridge is built, designed to be "climate-proof". Yet, according to some recent case studies by the OECD, although climate-related risks have often been identified in, for instance, policies, programmes and projects related to agriculture, this recognition has only rarely led to activities that are designed bearing in mind the expected impacts of climate change.

5. Need to increase awareness and knowledge of climate change impacts

Decision-makers and stakeholders in all sectors and at all levels need to be involved, in order to ensure that responses to climate change are tailored to meet sectoral specificities and local needs and circumstances. Increasing awareness and knowledge of climate change and its impacts among policy-makers and actors is thus an immediate and continuous challenge. In addition, knowledge of promising approaches, measures and methods to address the impacts effectively and economically should be developed and made easily accessible to stakeholders all over the world.

Also, in the EU countries work on national adaptation strategies has shown an urgent need to increase learning and dialogue on adaptation challenges and opportunities. Therefore, the EU looks forward to the results of the 5-year work programme on adaptation that will be developed by the SBSTA as part of the Buenos Aires Programme of Work.

6. International support can strengthen efforts of developing countries

The IPCC TAR recognised that the impacts of climate change will fall disproportionately upon developing countries and upon the poor people within all countries. Climate aspects should thus be integrated into development cooperation and funding policies aimed at supporting sustainable development. There is a need to identify the most effective and efficient way through which the international community, including governments, the private sector and NGOs, can strengthen

national and local efforts. At the international level, the magnitude of the challenge requires greater synergy between the implementation of various multilateral environmental agreements and between various international bodies, such as UN programmes and special agencies, and development banks.

The EU will continue to work with developing countries in helping them to build their capacities to adapt and take measures to respond to climate change impacts. The EU has provided substantial funds to assist developing countries in relation to adaptation, and will continue to do so (e.g. including from its share of the \$410 million funding commitment agreed in Bonn at COP6bis, and from other bilateral and multilateral sources).

7. Questions for discussion

To conclude, it is obvious that there are several challenges to be met when developing national and international adaptation responses. Perhaps this seminar could be used to consider provisional answers to questions such as the following:

- How can the knowledge base be enhanced locally, nationally and internationally concerning key vulnerabilities and the predicted impacts of climate change, and also possible adaptation measures and options? Likewise, what is required to enhance adaptive capacity?
- How can awareness of the adaptation challenge be enhanced among policy-makers and the general public? How can information about possible approaches and tools to address the problem be disseminated, and how can practitioners be educated about the "how to"?
- Finally, how can cross-sectoral communication be developed – again, locally, nationally and internationally?