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Impacts of climate change call for action at all levels

What priorities does the new Global Commission on Adaptation need to set?

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What priorities does the new Global Commission on Adaptation need to set?

Bonn, 18.10.2018, Led by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, philanthropist Bill Gates and World Bank CEO Kristalina Georgieva, the Global Commission on Adaptation to climate change began its work this week. Setting up the commission marks an urgently needed step by policy-makers towards finding answers to the increasing number of negative effects resulting from climate change. Just this month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its latest report highlighting the dramatic impacts of the global temperature rising by 1.5 degrees Celsius. The scientists' emphatic appeal shows that quick and comprehensive action is needed at all levels.

The Global Commission on Adaptation has set itself the goal of drumming up the requisite support and drawing greater attention to the topic. To this end, it will present a report to the UN Secretary-General's Climate Summit in September 2019 and issue recommendations to be acted on by partners from the worlds of politics and research, the private sector and civil society. Germany is a founding member of the commission and is represented by Federal Development Minister Gerd Müller. The launch event revealed the variety of views and ideas over what content areas to prioritise. The issue of adapting to climate change is no less complex than that of sustainable development. Setting the right priorities and focusing on the right points will be a challenging yet necessary task. The commission only has a mandate to 2020. An initial draft structure for the commission's report places the focus on four key areas: food security and rural livelihoods, cities and infrastructure, industry and supply chains, and the role of the natural environment and ecosystems. Mobilising finance and climate-resilient investments, including through involving the private sector, is to accelerate implementation and is being proposed as a further core issue.

Ultimately, the commission is responsible for setting priorities and recommending courses of action. In making its choices, however, it should consider four main criteria: firstly, the commission should channel its efforts towards those areas that are vital for safeguarding people's livelihoods and basic needs. In this regard, the priorities proposed to date for the report are spot on and comprehensive, covering as they do both urban and rural areas. However, the key issues of water availability and safeguarding health have not yet been considered.

Secondly, the commission should mobilise as many actors as possible and empower them to become active themselves. The proposal that providing finance and mobilising investments should take centre stage is sound. Adaptation to climate change has been under-

funded to date, and the significance of climate risks for investors and the financial markets has not yet been adequately addressed. Yet two important initiatives are missing here. For one, access to finance should be improved for non-governmental actors such as city councils or farmers as well as for inexpensive small-scale measures. Making funds available for this purpose via existing systems or innovative schemes is essential if key sub-national actors are to be mobilised and supported. In addition, many actors and countries lack both the necessary weather and climate data and the analytical capacity to define adaptation processes. This is a prerequisite for successful adaptation and is what distinguishes them from conventional development processes. Should weather and climate data not be seen as a global public good and made available for free? And how can we boost analytical capacity in an efficient and collaborative way?

Thirdly, a successful policy for adapting to climate change is one that is geared towards preventing future and additional risks. However, this must not stop at avoiding climate risks attached to investments but must also include potential negative consequences of climate mitigation investments themselves. One prominent example would be trade-offs relating to the building of dams. Looked at the other way, however, the greater sums being invested in climate protection also offer an opportunity to leverage synergy effects to increase capacities for adaptation. Under the UN Framework Convention, too little attention has hitherto been paid to either risk management or encouraging synergy effects.

Fourthly, the commission should embrace the principle of subsidiarity and pick out those issues that rely on global cooperation, such as insurance and risk transfer systems. Together with global partners, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has initiated important steps in this regard with the launch of the InsuResilience Global Partnership and the Global Risk Financing Initiative (GRIF), which was recently unveiled at the World Bank meeting in Bali. These have an important role to play, also with a view to safeguarding global supply chains and trade flows. As climate risks increase, so too does the extent to which these chains and flows are reliant on the respective other countries having sound national adaptation plans.

Let's open the debate about top priorities! The list of pressing matters could readily be added to and highlights the need for action that has continued to build up. In light of the growing risks posed by climate change, one can only wish the commission every success and hope that the wake-up call is heard by many.