

Vulnerability & Adaptation Work Program



Photo by Anne Hammill

Achieving sustainable development in a changing climate



Photo by Anne Hammill

For nearly a decade, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) has been actively engaged in understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change and its ramifications for the lives and livelihoods of people in Canada and the developing world. Our work has demonstrated IISD's commitment to developing the strategies, tools and policy advice needed at multiple spatial scales to effectively respond to the increasingly noticeable consequences of climate change.

Our Approach

IISD provides practical and informed guidance to policy-makers and field-level practitioners that supports their efforts to reduce vulnerability and enable adaptation at the local level over the long-term. To support this work, IISD has adopted an approach that promotes:

- ◆ **Integration:** embedding climate risk reduction in development decision-making processes at and across various spatial scales and in different sectors, recognizing the intimate links between development and adaptation.
- ◆ **Bridging the gap between knowing and doing:** experimenting with different ways to move from adaptation theory to adaptation practice.
- ◆ **Ecosystem-based approaches:** recognizing the complex relationships between the environment and human well-being and how these relationships can be harnessed for vulnerability reduction.
- ◆ **Working with others:** bringing together different communities of practice (e.g., development, conservation and disaster) and building upon the knowledge and strengths of partners active at different scales and within different sectors.
- ◆ **A holistic perspective:** understanding the multiplicity of social, economic, environmental and political factors that, along with climate change, influence the vulnerability of communities and countries.

Our Themes

IISD's work in the area of vulnerability and adaptation to climate change currently follows seven broad themes:

1. **Building policies that support adaptation.** IISD is working to identify policies that help individuals, communities and sectors adapt to the impacts of climate change. In Canada, this includes identifying policies that have historically helped farmers to cope with climate variability, reflecting upon how these policies could support vulnerability reduction over the long-term. In Africa, the focus is on feeding local lessons in risk reduction into selected national policies.
2. **Adaptive policies.** Policies that cannot perform effectively under dynamic and uncertain conditions run the risk of not achieving their intended purpose and becoming a hindrance to the ability of individuals, communities and businesses to cope with and adapt to change. Therefore, in order to help policies help people, IISD is researching and developing tools for policy-makers to craft policies that can respond to anticipated as well as unanticipated circumstances.
3. **Establishing an effective international policy regime.** At the international level, IISD is exploring the potential design of a post-2012 adaptation regime—one that will enable action through and outside of the UNFCCC process and that addresses the need to support adaptation in developed as well as developing countries. Within this work, IISD emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that moves the discussion beyond the financing of adaptation to looking at how to effectively integrate climate considerations into development processes and support the implementation of prioritized adaptation measures.
4. **Supporting that ability of practitioners to integrate adaptation considerations into planning and management decisions.** IISD is working with partners in the development assistance community and the private sector to develop, test and share different methods and tools for putting adaptation knowledge into practice. To do so, IISD is building upon existing frameworks such as the Sustainable Livelihoods approach. We are also incorporating established methods such as integrated assessment, environmental impact assessment, risk management and scenarios development.



Photo by Graham Ashford

5. **Exploring the socio-economic impacts of climate change.**

IISD is researching some of the less-understood but popularly cited consequences of climate change, such as the exacerbation of social tensions and violent conflict, and large-scale, forced migration. This work puts forward possible futures and their implications for sustainable development, and identifies strategies that could be used now to ameliorate negative outcomes.

6. **Integrated assessment of vulnerability and adaptation.**

Successful adaptation requires linking a retrospective, cross-scale analysis of key vulnerabilities with the analysis of future scenarios.

IISD explores the participatory development of adaptation policy pathways based on an indicator-based analysis of vulnerability that is a combined result of climate change and other forces of change.

7. **Incubating ideas.** Reflecting our commitment to innovation, IISD is exploring new approaches to risk reduction and adaptation. For example, we are looking at the potential role of micro-finance in enhancing the adaptive capacity of poor communities. As well, through research in Canada and Rwanda, IISD is assessing how payments for ecosystem services could play a role in reducing the biophysical and socio-economic vulnerability of communities to climate change.



Photo by Dimple Roy

Our Partners:

IISD is committed to working in partnership with other organizations and institutions based in Canada and around the world. Our current partners include:

International: African Centre for Technology Studies; CARE International; Center for Unconventional Security Affairs; International Union for Conservation of Nature; Kigali Institute for Science and Technology; Institute for Development Studies; Intercooperation; International Institute for Environment and Development; Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; Stockholm Environment Institute; The Energy and Resources Institute; United Nations Development Programme; UNEP/GRID–Geneva; United Nations Environment Programme; World Bank; and World Resources Institute.

In Canada: Manitoba Hydro; Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba; and Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada).

Our Team:

IISD's work in the area of vulnerability and adaptation brings together members of our Climate Change and Energy, Sustainable Natural Resources Management, and Measurement and Assessment programs. This combination of expertise and perspectives enables the cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches that is a key strength of our work in vulnerability and adaptation to climate change.

For further information about our work, please contact:

- ◆ Anne Hammill, IISD Geneva (ahammill@iisd.ca)
- ◆ Jo-Ellen Parry, IISD Winnipeg (jparry@iisd.ca)
- ◆ Darren Swanson, IISD Winnipeg (dswanson@iisd.ca)

The International Institute for Sustainable Development contributes to sustainable development by advancing policy recommendations on international trade and investment, economic policy, climate change, measurement and assessment, and natural resources management. Through the Internet, we report on international negotiations and share knowledge gained through collaborative projects with global partners, resulting in more rigorous research, capacity building in developing countries and better dialogue between North and South.

IISD's vision is better living for all—sustainably; its mission is to champion innovation, enabling societies to live sustainably. IISD is registered as a charitable organization in Canada and has 501(c)(3) status in the United States. IISD receives core operating support from the Government of Canada, provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Environment Canada; and from the Province of Manitoba. The institute receives project funding from numerous governments inside and outside Canada, United Nations agencies, foundations and the private sector.

International Institute for Sustainable Development
161 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3B 0Y4
Tel: +1 (204) 958-7700
Fax: +1 (204) 958-7710
E-mail: info@iisd.ca
Web site: <http://www.iisd.org/>

© 2008 IISD