

Science for the Real World - Speech by UNEP Deputy Executive Director Ibrahim Thiaw at the Adaptation Futures Conference, Rotterdam Tue, May 10, 2016



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Minister Schultz, your excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to Adaptation Futures.

I want to start by thanking not only the Government of the Netherlands and the European Commission for co-hosting this event with PROVIA, but also, WMO and UNESCO for working with us to create PROVIA, the Global Programme of Research on Climate Change Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation - back in 2011

That foresight, the support from member states and partners, and the subsequent hard work by the PROVIA community, has been critical in putting climate change adaptation on a par with mitigation efforts, in making the transition from awareness to strategic planning and action and in enabling the nearly 200 countries to engage with the historic Paris Agreement, which was signed last month.

It's clear that with this agreement, there is an even greater need to address knowledge gaps, to foster science and to develop practical tools.

However, some of the terminology is so over-used it can be meaningless. Even the word 'adaptation' can mean all things to all people: it could be adapting health requirements, infrastructure or legal frameworks. So it's important to remember that every discussion in a conference room must come back to using science for solutions in the real world - today.

For example, in the Panchase region of Nepal, villages, agriculture and the biodiversity rich forests are all being hit by rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, drying water sources and a

growing number of landslides, while disappearing livelihoods are taking young people with them - away from the mountains.

But residents working with UNEP, UNDP, IUCN and government and civil society partners are benefitting from ecosystem based adaptation measures. By growing native broom grass on degraded land they are reducing landslides, feeding livestock and selling cash crops. Their efforts are expanding to include the water restoration, flood control and alternative livelihoods like beekeeping and eco-tourism, while similar pilot projects in the Andes in Peru and Mount Elgon in Uganda are already gathering more knowledge and sharing the benefits even further.

But this is not a "developing nation" problem. Some of you will have seen last week's [New York Times story](#) on the United States' first climate refugees. The article makes the point that moving this small community of 60 people in Louisiana creates massive challenges and costs nearly \$50 million, but the bigger point for us - is how do we plan to address the issue when that figure comes with a thousand or a million after it?

That is why Adaptation Futures and the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) less than two weeks from now must ensure our efforts in adapting to climate change are fast, agile and relevant to every country and every community.

So, first, we need to better understand the scope, scale and speed of the effort required.

The scientific, political and financial communities working with PROVIA and UNEP are instrumental in understanding gaps in our knowledge and developing guidance to ensure policy making remains both responsive and rooted in the latest evidence.

For example, using common metrics to measure Country-Level Impacts of Climate Change - the CLICC Project - will assess gaps in national, regional and global adaptation and monitor progress in implementing adaptation measures, which will, in turn, support National Adaptation Plans and indicate where the international community needs to step in. You can learn more about this at the CLICC stand in the Expo.

However, we also need to understand the gaps in the resources to tackle all of these efforts. That is why, today, we are launching the Adaptation Finance Gap Report, which sheds more light on the gap between the finance currently available to adapt to climate change and the finance needed to meet our commitments.

The report clearly demonstrates that, even if we succeed in limiting temperature rise to 2 degrees, between 2020 and 2030, adapting to climate change could cost up to \$300 billion per year. Yet the amount of public finance currently available is closer to \$25 billion.

The figures speak for themselves: public funding alone will not be enough. So, to close the gap, we clearly need a better understanding of the complementary roles that private finance and actions can play.

However, the Paris Agreement and UNEP's Emissions Gap Report confirm that not only are we not yet on track to get down to 2 degrees, but we really need to be aiming closer to 1.5 degrees so, that \$275 billion gap is just the start.

Which brings me to the second point: once we better understand the scope, scale and speed of the effort required, we have to actually do it.

Clearly, we are not starting from scratch. There is solid commitment among stakeholders already working to build climate resilience, including national governments and NGOs, city authorities and local communities, the private sector and civil society,

I am delighted to see so many of you here today, because, together, we must scale up our ambition and our impact.

As the Emissions Gap Report shows, the gap can be closed using existing options, such as forest-related mitigation, renewables and energy efficiency.

In fact, we've already seen how preparing for the Paris Agreement encouraged the development of national climate policies and a shift towards low-carbon economies.

Likewise, look at The Sendai Framework, which focuses on understanding all aspects of disaster risk and the options to reduce it; strengthening partnerships and governance to manage it; increasing public and private investment to increase economic, social, health and cultural resilience to living with it; and actively preparing to "Build Back Better" if and when we are hit by it.

It's a great reminder that the right combination of science, policy, partnership and action is a powerful force for change and that sweet-spot is where UNEP and PROVIA belong.

So, let me just end by asking you to use this conference to share your own thoughts, experience and ideas - especially on how we can strengthen PROVIA and its performance in the future to engage with the four young scientists here from the PROVIA Fellowship Programme, and learn about what the next generation is thinking about the adaptation challenge and to set us up for a UNEA that moves us closer to a healthy planet, with healthy people, leaving no one behind.

The task is huge, but the rewards are even bigger.

Thank you.