



Impact of Climate Variability and Change on Vulnerable Populations

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Abstract: Climate variability, extremes and change are current threats, not a distant peril; and the risk is greatest where natural systems are severely degraded and human systems are functioning poorly, disproportionately affecting those who are the least able to cope with shocks – climatic or otherwise. As a stressor, climate change cuts across of range of development and humanitarian assistance sectors. As development-relief professionals, we are concerned that a well-meaning intervention in any one sector could create unintended consequences in a related sector, compromising overall objectives of the sectoral or regional programming. An illustrative example is a climate change mitigation program to create a protected area to increase country-level carbon sequestration for access of carbon market credits which may increase vulnerability of certain perimeter populations if the spoils are not equitably distributed. A guiding principle of host country partnerships for climate change will be to facilitate the capture of new cross-sectoral opportunities through coordinated expertise, while reducing the impact of any unintended cross-disciplinary consequences. Integrated assessments are a means of bringing such expertise together to evaluate programming in a manner that maximizes the positive impacts of programming. At this interface, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has the opportunity to enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations to the erratic climate realities of today and the projected climate changes of the future. The Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) houses a range of interdisciplinary expertise including in the physical and social sciences for addressing the needs of vulnerable populations worldwide, including flood/drought/famine early warning, climate variability and change adaptation, hydro-meteorological disaster risk reduction, social and institutional resilience, and clean energy and natural resource management. Practitioners can use impact assessments for alternative analysis to outline possible synergies and trade-offs for achieving program objectives while mitigating potential economic, environmental and social impacts.

Summary: Impact of climate variability and change are the greatest for those who the least able to cope. Climate change practitioners must facilitate new opportunities, while reducing unintended consequences, especially to the poor. Integrated impact assessments are a means of bringing together expertise that maximizes the positive impacts of programming.