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Defining Climate Adaptation Goals

RECOMMENDATION: Define global climate adaptation goals and gauge their achievement in terms of measurable improvements in local human security; finance support for adaptation from revenues formerly directed to fossil fuel subsidies. For instance, international support for increasing community-level flood control infrastructure and resilience, measured in terms of the number of people who survive future floods, represents an adaptation goal that could improve local human security.

Global Challenge Update: The world is on the precipice of a climate catastrophe that requires leadership, creativity, and significant resources in support of adaptation.¹ Take, for example, Bangladesh: large population centers within the country face threats of extreme flooding that are projected to worsen in the coming years, even as climate change forces more people into the country's already crowded cities.² The salinization of rivers, as witnessed in the Nile and Mekong, has also resulted from rising sea levels pushing saltwater into freshwater environments, damaging fisheries and farmland.³ These are just two examples of the urgent need to adapt to new climate-related environmental realities. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report further illustrates forecasting models that outline myriad

dangers of failing to curb current warming trends over the next decade and beyond, among which are rising sea levels and flooding (see figure 1).⁴

Innovation Proposal: In response to this fast emerging threat affecting potentially millions in the near-term, the Albright-Gambari Commission recommended that countries identify and commit to one or more climate adaptation goals and periodically assess their progress in terms of measurable impact on local human security. Measurable progress could highlight, for instance, more people surviving severe weather events, increasing access to water and food in drought-affected regions, or improving response times to disasters. Adaptation initiatives should assess baseline vulnerabilities (recognizing that vulnerability has multiple

dimensions) in order to measure improvements in human security arising from adaptation efforts, using a small number of context-specific indicators.⁵

Diverse international actors from across the UN system, regional development banks, the business community, and civil society will prove integral to equipping host nation governmental and non-governmental partners with the latest approaches, tools, and resources for effective adaptation. Making lessons and experience more readily shareable—through recently launched UN climate action clearinghouses—can accelerate, deepen, and improve the effectiveness of adaptation efforts worldwide.

Member states could find a significant portion of funding for this effort by discontinuing fossil fuel subsidies. Globally, countries spent

roughly U.S. \$310 billion in 2016 on fossil fuel subsidies, over 80 percent of it to support fossil fuel consumption.⁶ This incentivizes the use of fossil fuels and inhibits innovation. Fortunately, the removal of fossil fuel subsidies is gaining support, as evidenced in parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

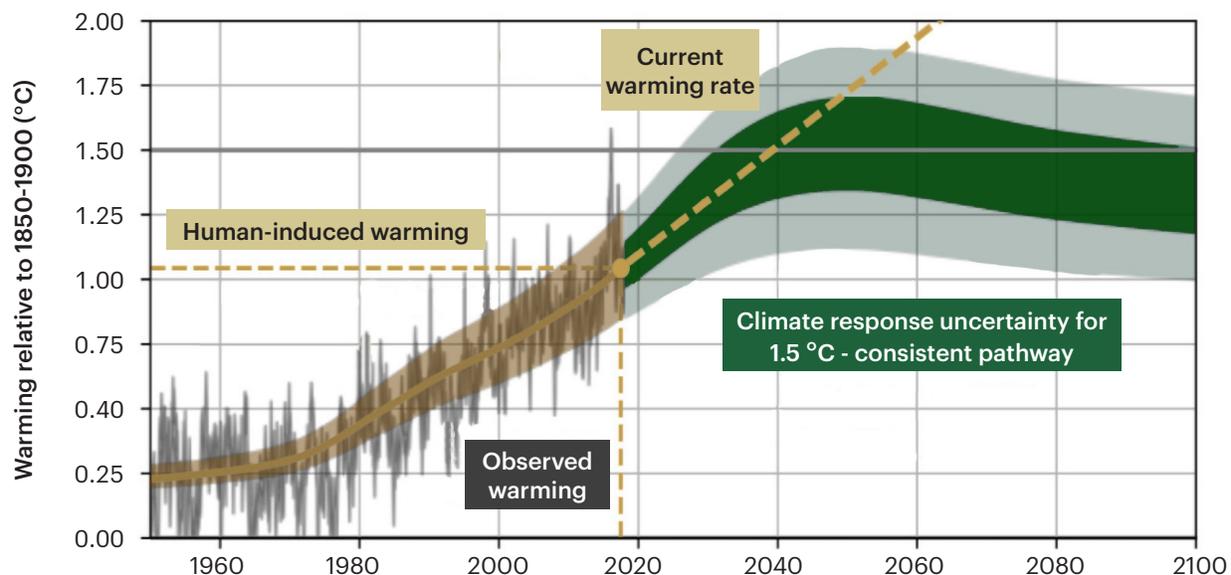
Strategy for Reform on the Road to 2020 (UN75): Over the coming fifteen months, there are multiple high-level conferences and initiatives that can strike a better balance between international mitigation and

adaptation efforts. This September's UN Climate Action Summit includes a track, led by the U.K. and Egypt, on "Resiliency and Adaptation." Adaptation remains a priority within Goal 13 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and H.E. Ban Ki-moon's Global Commission on Adaptation recently found that investing U.S. \$1.8 trillion globally in five areas from 2020 to 2030 could generate U.S. \$7.1 trillion in total net benefits.⁷

Moving forward, adaptation goals and specific political and technical

recommendations, such as those put forward by the Albright-Gambari and Ki-moon Commissions, should move to the center of the agenda at the upcoming UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties COP 25 (December 2019) and COP 26 (November 2020) meetings that will review progress on the Paris Climate Agreement's implementation. Climate action, including an emphasis on nationally defined climate adaptation goals as proposed above, must also feature prominently in next year's UN 75 Political Declaration.

FIGURE 1: IPCC Projections for Global Warming



SOURCE: IPCC, *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C*, Chapter 1 - Technical Annex 1.A, Fig 12.

ENDNOTES

1. See latest reports, for instance, of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Global Commission on Adaptation, and the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate.

2. UNDP. "Bangladesh." Accessed April 29, 2019. <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/bangladesh>.

3. Eyler, Brian. *Last Days of the Mighty Mekong*. London, UK: Zed Books, 2019, 286; "Beyond Scarcity Water Security in the Middle East and North Africa." MENA Development Group, 2018. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/publication/beyond-scarcity-water-security-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

4. United Nations. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C*. revised in January 2019, Ch. 3, 207-208. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_Low_Res.pdf.

5. Alexandre Magnan et. al., "What adaptation chapter in the New Climate Agreement", IDDRI Policy Brief no. 09/14. Paris: Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales, 2014.

6. International Energy Agency and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. "Update on Recent Progress in Reform of Inefficient Fossil Fuel Subsidies that Encourage Wasteful Consumption." Accessed May 17, 2019. <https://www.oecd.org/fossil-fuels/publication/OECD-IEA-G20-Fossil-Fuel-Subsidies-Reform-Update-2019.pdf>.

7. Global Commission on Adaptation, *Adapt Now: A Global Call for Leadership on Climate Resilience*. Accessed September 11, 2019. https://cdn.gca.org/assets/2019-09/GlobalCommission_Report_FINAL.pdf.