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Aid to Help Asia and Africa With Effects of Warming

By ANDREW C. REVKIN
Published: August 9, 2007

The Rockefeller Foundation says it will invest \$70 million over the next five years to help Asian cities and African farmers withstand floods, droughts and other global warming hazards.

Foundation officials say the help will be needed no matter what is done to limit greenhouse gas emissions, because the world faces decades of rising temperatures and sea levels as a result of a century-long buildup of gases like carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Poorer communities, lacking the money or technology to deal with a ruined harvest or an eroding coastline, face outside threats.

Environmental and philanthropic groups have focused on limiting greenhouse gases. But Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, said in an interview that helping vulnerable populations adapt to a changing climate must be a high priority.

"Emissions mitigation is fantastically important, but that is about changing behavior relative to future climate change," Ms. Rodin said. "In the meantime, data and almost daily news reports show climate change is already happening."

Ms. Rodin said the foundation would develop adaptation strategies that governments as well as international institutions, including the World Bank, could use. The bank has been working on making its third world development projects "climateproof," so they can withstand the effects of global warming. That initiative, involving efforts like new highways and agricultural programs, could cost tens of billions of dollars.

Bank officials welcomed descriptions of the Rockefeller plan, which is being publicly announced today.

"The poor in developing countries will be hit the hardest by climate change," said Katherine Sierra, vice president for sustainable development at the bank. "For them, any contribution from any sector to help their economies and societies adapt should be encouraged. So we particularly welcome the Rockefeller Foundation's initiative."

Other foundations have started concentrating on the need to limit vulnerability to climate change.

Andrew J. Bowman, director of a \$100 million climate program announced last month by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, said about a quarter of that amount would go toward adaptation projects, mainly aimed at preserving wildlife habitat in a shifting climate.

The Rockefeller project, the Climate Change Resilience Initiative, will focus almost entirely on limiting risks to human populations, Ms. Rodin said.

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Maria Blair, an associate vice president at the foundation, said a major goal would be to help Asian cities like Mumbai and Bangkok that are prone to flooding. The program will help such cities assess threats and devise tools to cut risks, including land-use plans, building codes and catastrophe insurance, she said.

The foundation says it will help African farmers who face severe hazards from drought along with a host of other problems, find ways to improve yields.

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