

Chapter 2

Climate Change Discourse and Adaptation Narrative

ABSTRACT

This chapter defines the dominant climate change discourse and the adaptation narrative linking the latter with mainstream social sciences. As commonly observed, the current discourse on climate change adaptation is rich and dynamic. However, because of the diversity of disciplines engaged in it, the narrative at times would lack coherence as seen in discussion threads on vulnerability, awareness and resilience. The climate change community submits that one's exposure to climate threats, sensitivity to climate extremes and adaptive capacity to climate impacts determine vulnerability to climate risks. Furthermore, the community uses the terms awareness and knowledge interchangeably when the behavioral and learning science traditions make clear distinctions and differentiations between the two. The current discourse also pays emphasis on the words resilience and sustainability and highlights the transdisciplinary nature of each. The authors present their arguments on how these discussion threads should be effectively treated.

INTRODUCTION

Current Climate Change Discourse

When the climate change community convenes, we see an assorted group. First, we have the politicians who have made climate change into a political

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platform followed by technocrats and policy makers who paint extreme scenarios that prompt us to act. They are ably supported by academics and scientists armed with voluminous meteorological and biogeophysical data. The most vocal in the community come from civil society organizations who feel that they, representing the interests of vulnerable communities, carry the heaviest burden and have the biggest stake in the discussion.

Three of the most dominant threads in the global discourse on climate change adaptation are vulnerability, awareness and resilience.

Vulnerabilities

The climate change community submits that one's exposure to climate threats, sensitivity to climate extremes and adaptive capacity to climate impacts determine vulnerability to climate risks. The IPCC (2012) forwards the following function:

$$\text{Vulnerability} = f(\text{exposure, sensitivity, adaptive capacity})$$

To increase adaptive capacities of communities, we look at the threats and risks that climate change poses. Changing climates result in storms that are more powerful during the stormy season, more destructive floods and landslides during the wet season, and more intense droughts and wildfire during the dry season. The coming of these once regular and predictable seasons becomes erratic. The conditions for their occurrences become uncertain and would vary from one area to another. They carry far-reaching consequences on every social sector.

Rural and urban communities are vulnerable to highly destructive storms and to the breakdown of social services that is expected to follow. Those living in coastal areas are vulnerable to storm surges. Those in the lowlands are vulnerable to floods. Those in the uplands are prone to landslides. Farms will be vulnerable to drought and industries to power failures. Entire populations will suffer from the lack of food and water. Even their shelter and health will be threatened not to mention their lives. Those with the least access to resources, the most deprived, the least fit, the elderly and the young are the most helpless.

How can so-called *climate actions* or interventions be planned for such a diverse lot under such diverse circumstances and conditions?

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