

## 'The Evolution of Adaptation in Science and Global Policy' lecture

*Dr Saleemul Huq*

Review by [Steve Orchard](#), CCCEP-funded PhD student at the University of Leeds

Saleemul Huq commenced his talk by stating that although observations of global warming during the past century cannot be directly attributed to human actions, this does show that we are already living in a globally warmed world with impacts that we will all have to face. Huq went on to explain how the evolution of the concept of climate change has influenced what the solution to the problem should be. This conception, he argued, had developed from an initial belief that emissions of green house gasses would only affect *future* climate, and that this could be resolved by reducing current emissions. Hence, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the COP3 Kyoto Protocol focussed on mitigation issues to prevent and avoid the worst outcomes of climate change. However, with the IPCC Third Assessment Report highlighting the failures to prevent some levels of climate change, and that the impacts would fall primarily on the poor, Huq described how adaptation began to be conceived of as inevitable and unavoidable, and hence increased in significance as a strategy to deal with the problem. In recognition of this the COP7 Marrakech Accord established the Least Developed Country Fund, which consisted of voluntary contributions by nations to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to support National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs).

With the IPCC fourth assessment report providing evidence of actual observations of climate change, and not just projections, Huq explained how the COP13 Bali Action Plan recognised adaptation as an equal response to the problem as mitigation. In addition, even rich countries who previously thought they would not have to adapt started taking adaptation seriously to protect their citizens. However, Huq pointed out that even though adaptation itself was no longer a contentious issue, the funding of it certainly is. He went on to highlight several critical issues including concerns of the balance between adaptation and mitigation of fast track finance, problems ensuring

rich countries do not double count new and additional adaptation funding with existing development assistance, and how funds will be delivered, with developed countries favouring bilateral or multilateral mechanisms and developing nations preferring the established UNFCCC conventions.

Huq proceeded to emphasize that even though climate science has influenced international conventions, this has not filtered down to the national level, where politicians tend to pursue short-term economic interests. Furthermore, Huq recognised the general pessimistic mood surrounding climate change due to the failure of COP15 in Copenhagen to reach a comprehensive deal, which he attributed to a lack of preparedness on the part of world leaders. Huq concluded by saying that even though he had no aspirations for the forthcoming negotiations in Cancun or South Africa, he was optimistic of the prospects for the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report to improve our knowledge and provide momentum to make progress with following UNFCCC negotiations. This, he argued, should present us with an opportunity to once again heighten the awareness of climate change, forcing transformational decisions at global level which can then be implemented at national level, and tip us over into a new era of low carbon climate resilient growth pathways.