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## Climate change: Adaptation and mitigation

"You can't walk away from climate change", Ian Macfarlane said last night, and I had to agree with him, although it seems that many people want to try. Even though the consensus now firmly favours the believers, and the sceptics are a dwindling minority, those that propose action to actually *address* climate change still face deeply entrenched opposition. Change is not easy, particularly when it's the majority that has to change and a large part of our economy along with it.

There's no doubt that we've gone too far down the road to avoid impacts now. The processes that have been put in train have a huge momentum, so the environmental changes we can observe now have probably got a long way left to run. Even if the world became 'greenhouse neutral' tomorrow, warming would continue until the new equilibrium is reached.

Responding to climate change isn't going to be cheap. A lot of our infrastructure and is going to have to be replaced and established practices are going to have to change. Agricultural industries will of course be amongst the most impacted due to their direct climatic linkage, though there may be winners and losers depending on what changes occur and where. In the long term, people living in the lowest lying areas such as the Mekong Delta and southern Bangladesh may be affected by saline intrusions into agricultural lands and ultimately displaced by even small rises in sea level. Quite clearly a lot of people are going to need new jobs, some industries will face considerable disruption and in the long term many people will also somewhere new to live as well.

We need to start thinking about how to cope with the coming changes. Just as the climate has a massive inertia, so does society. Getting people to change their behaviour will probably be a generational issue, so it is vital that we start now. There's some good news on that front, there's evidence that donors and the development community are beginning to put resources into projects concerning *adaptation* to climate change.

At the same time, we also need to think about how to avoid making the climate change problem worse. Unfortunately, we are not seeing the same amount of donor activity in climate change *mitigation*. Perhaps this is because adaptation is an issue where donor interventions directly affect and improve the livelihoods of the poor, whereas mitigation is not. At the end of the day we need both, but in the long term mitigation is the only choice we have. We cannot pursue an endless cycle of adaptation, climate change mitigation needs to be kept on the books as well.

*Simon Wilkinson*