

M. C. Lemos: Building Adaptive Capacity to Climate Variability and Change in Developing Countries

This presentation focuses on the relevance of adaptive capacity in the context of the increasing certainty that climate change impacts will affect human populations and different social groups substantially and differentially. It argues for greater attention to increasing climate risks in the design of development policies. The argument builds on two conceptual distinctions. The first is between specific and general adaptive capacity where specific adaptive capacity refers to the ability of agents and systems to address the risks specific to a particular climate threat and generic adaptive capacity references household endowments and system characteristics that enable more flexible responses to a diverse range of climate threats and other stressors. Bolstering both generic and specific adaptive capacities, with careful attention to minimizing the potential tensions between these two types of adaptive capacity, can help vulnerable groups maintain their ability to address risks in the long run at the same time as they respond effectively to short term climate impacts. An analogous distinction concerns the idea of adaptive development; the paper highlights how future development policies and interventions are likely to require greater attention to risk reduction to secure the objective of greater welfare because more frequent, intense, and widespread climate threats may otherwise undermine development gains. Finally it highlights the fact that specific and generic adaptive capacity are not always positively related, just as development interventions and growth focused development outcomes can sometimes reduce the ability to cope with risks. Using a number of case examples, the paper identifies how to enhance the potentially synergistic relationship between specific and generic adaptive capacity or between risk reduction and growth, equity, and sustainability.

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Dr Maria Carmen Lemos is an Associate Professor of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Senior Policy Scholar at the Udall Center for the Study of Public Policy at the University of Arizona. She has MSc and PhD degrees in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). From 2006 to 2007, she was a James Martin 21st Century School Fellow at the Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University. Her research focuses on environmental public policymaking in Latin America and the United States, especially as it relates to the human dimensions of climate change, the co-

production of science and policy, and the role of technoscientific knowledge and environmental governance in building adaptive capacity to climate variability and change response. She is a co-founder of Icarus (Initiative on Climate Adaptation Research and

Understanding through the Social Sciences), which seeks to foster collaboration and exchange among scholars focusing on vulnerability and adaptation to climate change. She is a lead author of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Synthesis Report and a contributor to the United States Climate Change Science Program Report. She has served on number of NRC/NAS committees, including Restructuring Federal Climate Research to Meet the Challenges of Climate Change, the America's Climate Choices Science Panel and the Human Dimensions of Environmental Change Committee.