An Unequal Adaption to Climate Change

What is the issue?

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- There are ongoing efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and restrict global warming to below 2°C or even below 1.5°C.
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- Simultaneously, there are also efforts in many countries on projects developing adaptation techniques to cope with rising average global temperatures.
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What is the problem with Adaptation Projects?

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- Many adaptation projects study what climate impacts are expected, what kinds of vulnerabilities exist locally and how these can be addressed.
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- But a 2010 survey covering over 1,700 projects concluded that adaptation projects were mostly elite centric and didn’t focus on the vulnerable.
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- The ‘Global Adaptation Fund’, managed by the UN climate secretariat also runs projects to assist developing countries adapt to climate adversaries.
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- Even these projects were not accounting for unequal power structures, with the well off cornering most of the limited allocated resources.
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- When failures of adaptation projects were studied, most of it fell into one of the four main headers that were discovered.
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What are the four headers?

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- The first is enclosure, which is when private agents acquire public assets or expand their authority over them, to the deprivation of the rest.
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- Exclusion is the second mode of failure, which is associated with some stakeholders getting excluded or marginalised in the scheme of things.
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- The third is encroachment, in which the adaptation actions undertaken during the project end up intervening in areas that are rich in biodiversity.
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- This thereby interferes with the ecosystem’s natural services and often results in an increase in greenhouse gas emissions.
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- The last is entrenchment, where the condition worsens for those who are already disempowered or marginalised in the local social context.
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- This includes the poor, women or other minorities and the disabled.
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What are some projects that can be classified under the above headers?

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- There are various examples of projects from both developing and advanced industrial countries that fail under these themes.
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- A private desalination plant was constructed in Melbourne (Australia), by government seizure of land from the Bunurong aboriginal community.
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- In Norway, the representation of community organisations and environmental groups were low during the coastal planning process.
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- Hence, their concerns, ideas and aspirations couldn’t be voiced effectively.
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- In Alaska, the Army Corps and private contractors built a barrier against the sea even though this was against the wishes of the local community.
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- In Tanzania marine protection areas were set up to boost the resilience of coral reefs by encroaching on the lands of traditional fishing communities.
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- Interestingly, this forced them to turn resort to energy-intensive farming for a livelihood, which led to higher rates of greenhouse gas emissions.
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- Disaster relief funds provided to cities first led to crises in rural communities in Kenya and also led to political unrest.
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- Notably, all these situations may also result in multiple harmful effects, and can be classified under multiple headers.
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Why excessive stress on Tech-centric solutions is a strain?

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- There has been a tendency to identify climate impacts and then regard technology as the straightforward solution.
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- For example, use drip irrigation or watershed development to increase water availability, or building barriers along the shore for protection from storms.
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- The problem in such an approach is that the 2^{nd} order ramifications and worsening of social and political conditions of the masses are usually ignored.
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- Thus, adaption projects, in addition to vulnerabilities and costs, should also consider justice and social hierarchies in its very design.
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- Otherwise, existing social, economic, ecological and political problems might get aggravated.
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What is the way forward?

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- Power struggles to control resources need to be acknowledged as indispensible and mechanisms to anticipate and deal with them correctly needs to be built.
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- These are needed to prevent elitist capture of resources as land, water and other privileges like being involved in decisions needs to be shared with all.
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- A thorough analysis of stakeholders' interests and power relationships between allies and competitors are hence vital in adaptation projects.
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- **India’s case -** India is a deeply stratified society with entrenched elite networks and growing levels of inequality and a burgeoning population.
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- Additionally, multiple adaptation projects are being carried out in India, considering its geography and particularly significant climate vulnerability.
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- Hence, anticipating problems and trying to reduce the adverse effects with the ultimate aim to reduce the effects of global warming are needed.
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Source: The Hindu

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