

Policy report

# Dying to adapt

A comparison of African healthcare spending and climate adaptation costs



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📷 Cover photo: Cattle farmer in Asbehari village in Afar, Ethiopia

📷 Photo above: Ethiopian family survey the arid landscape in Asbehari village  
Photos: Chris Hoskins/Tearfund

# Executive summary

**African countries need to spend money they don't have to adapt to a crisis they did not create – and it's likely to come at the cost of crucial public services. Our analysis shows that sub-Saharan African countries could face climate adaptation costs that are up to five times higher than their national spend on healthcare.**

The climate crisis is a global challenge – but its impacts are disproportionately felt by people living in poverty in low-income countries. It is a huge injustice that the impacts, and the costs, of the crisis are being borne by communities that have the fewest resources to respond to it – and who did the least to cause it.

Action is needed urgently to ensure that climate-vulnerable countries are able to protect themselves. Our analysis of their national climate plans (known as Nationally Determined Contributions) and National Adaptation Plans suggests that climate adaptation costs are rising and, in some countries, are already far outstripping national spending on healthcare.

In the meantime, innovative climate solutions are being developed by climate-vulnerable communities – but in many cases the full impact of these solutions is being held back by lack of finance.

In 2009 leaders of wealthy nations promised to deliver US\$100 billion a year from 2020 to 2025 to help low-income countries mitigate and adapt to climate change. But this pledge has still not been fully met. Since then, the scale of adaptation needs has continued to grow. It is estimated that international climate finance is currently providing low-income countries with as little as one tenth of what they need for adaptation.

The UK Government holds the COP Presidency until November 2022, so the UK has a unique opportunity to play a key role in accelerating progress on the vital issue of climate finance. As COP26 President, the UK Government should use its influence to ensure that:

- the promised \$100 billion is delivered annually in full, with 50 per cent allocated for adaptation
- finance reaches local communities most impacted by the climate crisis

Delivering this promised – and long overdue – finance is key to rebuilding trust with climate-vulnerable communities and alleviating their suffering. It is also vital for leveraging the scale of funding needed for them to respond to the climate crisis.



📍 Ethiopian family sit in a dry river bed in Asbehari village in Afar, Ethiopia  
Photo: Chris Hoskins/Tearfund

## Part 1: The challenge

**‘Without financial help, it will be impossible for many families and communities to adapt to and survive the impacts of the climate crisis.’**

**Promise Salawu,**  
Advocacy Officer, Tearfund Nigeria

**African countries need to spend money they don't have to adapt to a crisis they did not create. Without more support, this is likely to come at the cost of crucial public services such as healthcare.**

The climate crisis is a global challenge – but its impacts are not equally distributed. Half of the world's population is highly vulnerable to the climate crisis, and they are disproportionately populations living in poverty in low-income countries. For millions of people in these nations, the climate crisis means empty stomachs, livelihoods destroyed and homes swept away – and this is happening right now. It is a huge injustice that the impacts, and the costs, of the crisis are being borne by communities that have the fewest resources to respond to it – and who did the least to cause it.



Droughts such as the one affecting East Africa in 2022 are becoming more frequent and severe as a result of the climate crisis. Four years of failed harvests have left millions of

people on the brink of famine in that region alone. Against the global backdrop of recovery from the pandemic, and rising energy and food prices, adapting to the climate crisis is adding another huge financial burden to climate-vulnerable communities.

This in turn means that some of the most climate-vulnerable nations could be forced to divert money away from crucial public services in order to protect themselves against intensifying climate impacts. Indeed, our analysis of national climate plans (known as Nationally Determined Contributions) and National Adaptation Plans has shown that **sub-Saharan African countries could face climate adaptation costs that are up to five times higher than their national spend on healthcare.**

Eleven countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with a total population of more than 350 million people, now face climate adaptation costs that are larger than their national spend on healthcare. Together, they make up more than a third of sub-Saharan Africa's population. These nations are Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania and Sudan (see Figure 1 on page 5). On average, these countries would have to spend eight per cent of their GDP to adapt to intensifying climate impacts (see Figure 2 on page 5) – among the highest spending proportionally in the world – yet on average they emit 27 times less per person than the global average.<sup>1</sup>

The scale of adaptation needs continues to grow – but it is estimated that low-income countries are currently receiving as little as one tenth of what they need for adaptation from international climate finance.<sup>2</sup> Climate-vulnerable countries have been consistently clear that this funding gap for climate finance – especially for adaptation – needs to be urgently addressed by the COP President and high-emitting nations.<sup>3</sup>

 **Dried-out millet in Dabkere, Chad, where lack of rainfall is affecting harvests**  
Photo: Peter Caton/Tearfund

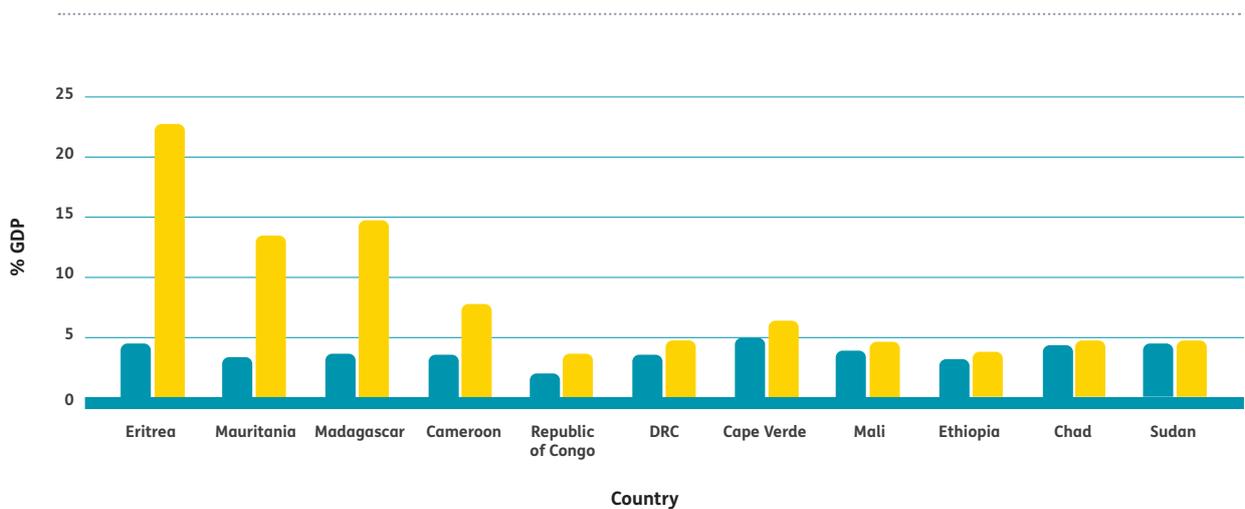
**Figure 1**



**Figure 1 (map):** Eleven countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with a collective population of more than 350 million people, face climate adaptation costs that are larger than their national spend on healthcare.

**Figure 2**

 % GDP on healthcare  % GDP on climate adaptation



**Figure 2 (graph):** Per cent of GDP needing to be spent on climate adaptation and spending on healthcare by country. The countries are ordered according to their respective ratio between the % GDP needing to be spent on climate adaptation and the % GDP spent on healthcare. The average spend on climate adaptation equates to 8% of GDP.

## Part 2: The opportunity

**In the meantime, we are seeing innovative climate solutions being developed by climate-vulnerable communities, from solar-powered wells to sustainable farming practices. But in many cases the full impact of these solutions is being held back by lack of finance.**

**‘Our governments are unable to do some things because the challenge is that we don’t have enough finances. Many people out there, most especially in the global south, have been so innovative, they have come up with good ideas. But the challenge is these activities are happening but some are unable to really finish. Many rich countries have been promising, they have said every good word. How I wish they fulfilled what they promised. This could be really achieved and we could fight this climate action.’**

**Erasto Richard Magamba**, Commonwealth Youth Parliamentarian, based in Uganda

In Ethiopia – a country currently hit hard by climate change-induced drought and flooding – communities in which Tearfund works are making every effort to build resilience.

In the Wolaita area in southern Ethiopia, more than 10,000 farmers are now practising conservation agriculture. This means they can grow crops even in dry seasons, helping them to adapt to the impacts of increased and prolonged drought. Climate finance would enable the scaling-up of these practices in other regions, increasing resilience amid a crisis that is causing hunger and malnutrition as well as the loss of livestock and livelihoods.

In 2009 world leaders promised to deliver \$100 billion a year from 2020 to 2025 to support low-income countries and communities to mitigate and adapt to climate change. But – despite many repetitions of the pledge – in 2022 the \$100-billion-a-year promise still has not been fully met. Of the funding that has been delivered, much has come as loans rather than grants, adding to national debts which have already grown rapidly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Moreover, the shortfall in the promised climate finance amounts to just 0.02 per cent of global GDP<sup>4</sup> – a fraction of the seven per cent of global GDP that is currently spent on global fossil fuel subsidies.<sup>5</sup>

The UK played a central role in securing the original climate finance promise in 2009. Now, with its COP Presidency continuing until November 2022, the current UK Government has a unique opportunity to accelerate progress towards its fulfilment. In particular, it can catalyse progress in the funding of locally led initiatives, making sure climate finance reaches the communities most affected by climate change and shaping a path for other wealthy nations to invest in innovation happening in climate-vulnerable communities. As the COP26 President, the UK Government should use its influence to ensure that:

- the promised \$100 billion is delivered annually in full, with 50 per cent allocated for adaptation
- finance reaches local communities most impacted by the climate crisis

Delivering this promised – and long overdue – finance is key to rebuilding trust with climate-vulnerable communities and alleviating their suffering. It is also vital for leveraging the scale of funding needed for them to respond to the climate crisis.

This finance would also enable sustainable solutions and green jobs to be created. As the work of Tearfund partners in Ethiopia shows, sustainable solutions could empower more people to lift themselves out of poverty; adapting to the climate crisis does not have to come at the cost of crucial public services such as healthcare. Instead, climate adaptation supported by sufficient finance could unleash the great economic and innovative potential that already exists in climate-vulnerable communities.

## Part 3: Annex

This report contains new statistics comparing climate adaptation costs and healthcare spending in sub-Saharan African countries as calculated below.

### Healthcare expenditure of each country

The World Bank reports on how much each country spends on healthcare as a percentage of GDP<sup>6</sup>. This report uses the latest data available as of May 2022, which is the 2019 data.

### Estimated climate adaptation costs faced by each country

This report uses the 48 sub-Saharan African countries' estimated climate adaptation costs outlined in their respective versions of the following:

- **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** indicates each country's emissions reduction target, planned mitigation and adaptation actions, and the finance needed. Several countries have indicated the respective proportions of 'conditional' and 'unconditional' contributions towards climate adaptation. Unconditional contribution is what countries have committed themselves to implementing based on their own resources, while conditional contribution is the additional

commitments they will undertake if sufficient international support is provided. The total of conditional and unconditional contributions is used in this report to indicate the overall adaptation costs and to give comparable figures across countries.

- **National Adaptation Plan (NAP)** outlines a country's adaptation needs, adaptation plans and the finance needed. Not all sub-Saharan African countries have one yet.

For countries which have submitted both an NDC and an NAP, this report uses the adaptation cost estimation figure stated in the more recent document.

This figure is then divided by the number of years covered by the NDC or NAP (as applicable), to calculate the annual cost. The annual cost is then calculated as a proportion of each country's GDP, as reported by the World Bank<sup>7</sup>. The report uses the most updated GDP data available as of May 2022, which is the 2020 data. The exception is Eritrea where the latest data is from 2011.

**The following table presents the data of the 11 countries which face climate adaptation costs higher than their national spend on healthcare.**

Country	Source of climate adaptation cost	% GDP – climate adaptation cost <sup>8</sup>	% GDP – healthcare expenditure
Cameroon	NDC**	7.81	3.60
Cape Verde	NDC*	6.40	4.94
Chad	NAP**	4.80	4.35
Republic of Congo	NDC*	3.73	2.08
DRC	NDC*	4.74	3.54
Eritrea	NDC*	22.7	4.46
Ethiopia	NDC**	3.76	3.24
Madagascar	NDC*	14.7	3.69
Mali	NDC*	4.58	3.89
Mauritania	NDC*	13.4	3.30
Sudan	NDC**	4.69	4.57

\*The country does not have a NAP or there is no adaptation cost estimation in the NAP.

\*\*The document is used because it is the more recent document.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Calculated from the dataset published in the following: Ritchie H., Roser M. and Rosado P. (2020) *CO<sub>2</sub> and greenhouse gas emissions*

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (2021) *Adaptation gap report 2021*

<sup>3</sup> Climate Vulnerable Forum (2021) *Climate vulnerables' manifesto for COP26*

<sup>4</sup> Using the climate finance figure reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and global GDP as reported by the World Bank

<sup>5</sup> Using the figure of global fossil fuel subsidies as reported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and global GDP as reported by the World Bank

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2022). 'Current health expenditure (% of GDP) – sub-Saharan Africa'

<sup>7</sup> World Bank (2022). 'GDP (current US\$)'

<sup>8</sup> Several countries reported their estimated climate adaptation cost in euros. The figures in euros have been converted into US dollars with a conversion rate of 1 euro to 1.09 US dollars (as at the time of analysis).

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