The IPCC Fifth Assessment Report reiterates with renewed conviction that human activities contribute to climate change, the impacts of which are felt in the form of extreme climate events (e.g. droughts and floods) and weather variability (e.g. changes in rain patterns). The complex human-climate interactions severely impact socio-economic and development outcomes in arid and semi-arid lands (see Bowen et al. 2012). Unless adequate steps are taken, climate change is likely to ‘offset’ development progress and ‘derail sustainable development’ (Denton et al. 2014, p. 1109) in such areas.

Semi-arid lands (SALs), home to over 1 billion people and covering 15% of global land, are vulnerable to climate change due to low annual precipitation, high ecological sensitivity, and underlying poverty exacerbated by dependence on traditional livelihoods (Bizikova et al. 2012). Reliance on climate-sensitive sectors, such as agriculture and forestry, subjugates economic performance to climate variability. Ascertaining how resilient developing economies are in such areas to the adverse impacts of climate change will depend to a large extent on government and other relevant stakeholder responses to such challenges.

Semi-arid countries across Asia and Africa exhibit varying levels of development and adaptive capacities in coping with climate change. For example, governments of Kenya, Tanzania and Senegal have well-developed institutional setups and regional programmes to respond to climate change, in spite of drawbacks in development progress. On the other hand, countries with better performance in development indicators, such as Pakistan and Tajikistan in Asia, have been slow to deliberate local responses to climate change. Understanding that well-targeted government responses are the key to ensuring sustainable development, it is crucial to evaluate how semi-arid countries balance economic growth with development needs and aim for climate-resilience.

In this panel, representatives from six semi-arid regions across Asia and Africa (Burkina Faso, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, Tajikistan and Pakistan) will respond to the following questions from their country perspective:

- How semi-arid lands in their specific country/region contribute to the national economy? What is their development status and socio-economic condition? What are the predominant economic activities in their SALs, and how do they contribute to building (or undermining) climate-resilience?
- How do their governments balance economic aspirations with development needs and priorities in pursuance of sustainable and climate-resilient development?
- How can political decisions be facilitated to make the development process (and economic growth) resilient to adverse impacts of climate change? What are the high-level adaptation priorities both in public and private sectors?

The focus of this panel would be on discerning pathways to climate-resilient economic development in semi-arid regions. The discussions will contribute to on-going research in a newly launched project, Pathways to Resilience in Semi-arid Economies (PRISE) that is jointly supported by IDRC and DFID. While panel speakers have been shortlisted to include representatives of PRISE consortium (Overseas Development Institute in UK, IED Afrique in Africa, and IED in Central Asia).
Senegal and University of Dares Salam in Tanzania), interested participants are welcome to contribute their valuable insights during the open discussion session.

References


Panel Organisers:
Ms. Sadia Ishfaq, Research Associate, Environment and Climate Change Unit, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad, Pakistan
Email address: sadiaishfaq@sdpi.org

Dr. Abid Q. Suleri, Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad, Pakistan
Email address: suleri@sdpi.org