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#### Nature Reports Climate Change

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The Macmillan Building, 4 Crinan St  
London N1 9XW, UK  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7833 4000  
e-mail: [nature@nature.com](mailto:nature@nature.com)

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# nature REPORTS climate change

the news behind the science, the science behind the news

## AILING ADAPTATION

Few remain convinced that political will or technological developments will 'solve' global warming, least of all the inhabitants of those nations already affected. Even if we were to slash emissions by 80 per cent from 1990 levels by 2050 — seen by many as a politically troublesome target — the damage caused would still be considerable (see pages 68–70 of this issue).

And though much harm could be avoided by investing in adaptation now, the sums required are in the region of tens of billions for developing nations alone, rising to an estimated US\$28–67 billion per year by 2030. This is money that developing countries simply don't have, and that by all rights they shouldn't have to pay to clean up a mess created as a legacy of industrialization in the West.

Despite a history of paltry adaptation aid from the world's major emitters — some US\$67 million to date — the establishment of a bigger, better adaptation fund at the UN conference on climate change in Bali last December provided a glimmer of hope that the West would come good and begin shouldering the financial burden of the developing world's adaptation to climate change.

But in what can only be seen as a renegeing of this commitment, the United Kingdom — a leader at the UN talks — has now announced that its £800 million 'environmental transformation fund' to pay for developing-world adaptation will be given almost entirely in the form of loans with interest, rather than grants (*The Guardian*, 17 May 2008; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/may/16/climatechange.internationalaidanddevelopment>).

The UK, which is allegedly seeking the support of other G8 nations for this approach, plans to launch the fund — still earmarked as 'aid' — as the showpiece contribution to developing nations at the G8's annual summit to be held Hokkaido, Japan, in July.

Given that the fund was used as a bartering tool in Bali, where it was well-received internationally as a measure that would deliver support to those already experiencing the impacts of warming, such as drought, crop failure and sea level rise, it seems especially unjust that the UK will now instead use it to make developing countries pay for a problem caused by the developed world.

The decision to route the money through a multilateral fund managed by the World Bank, rather than through the United Nations, is also curious. In addition to having a poor reputation among loan recipients for excessively controlling how received money is spent, the World Bank has also come under fire recently for continuing to finance the oil and gas industries, to the tune of US\$1.5 billion between 2005 and 2007 alone.

The decision to loan adaptation 'aid' not only represents a shirking by the UK of its moral obligation to help developing nations adapt to climate change, it also undermines the UN process assigned to this very task, instead handing the job to a major funder of greenhouse gas emissions.

OLIVE HEFFERNAN, EDITOR

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