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## McGill Study Asks “Are We Adapting to Climate Change?”

Delegates from around the world are preparing for the UN climate change talks that kick off in Mexico at the end of the month. While debate over emissions targets continues to rage in the wake of last year’s talks in Copenhagen, there is one area where nations agree: we’re going to have to adapt.

Yet despite the newfound interest in adaptation, it remains unclear if adaptation is possible or what challenges we will face. A study released last week in the prestigious scientific journal *Global Environmental Change*, led by Dr Berrang-Ford at McGill University, sheds light on these questions. Posing the question, *Are we adapting to climate change?*, the study highlights that adaptation is already taking place and is possible but is piecemeal and ad hoc in nature.

“Human beings will have to adapt to climate change, but there is little evidence of a coherent strategy for adaptation efforts. A strategy or framework for adaptation is clearly needed at international to local levels,” says Dr. Lea Berrang Ford, Assistant Professor of Geography at McGill University. “While we have highly developed methods and frameworks for assessing greenhouse gas emissions within the climate change debate, our ability to track and monitor adaptation is underdeveloped. In the face of the climate changes scientists say we’re already locked into, this is a problem. If we’re to adapt successfully, we have to start taking action now.”

“Most scientific work on adaptation looks at prescriptions or takes a theoretical approach, looking at what *needs to be done*,” explains the study’s co-author Dr. James Ford. “In this study we actually looked at what *has been done* to adapt.” The authors will continue to refine their study’s methodology in order to track adaptation progress over time.

“We wanted to take a snapshot of what adaptation is actually occurring, so we developed a technique to rigorously track adaptation progress. One big surprise was that there are fewer reports of adaptation taking place in North America than there are in Africa,” says Ford. However, Ford notes that there is more attention shifting to adaptation and that more reports are now being published that were not ready in time to be included in the McGill review.

“If we are to adapt to climate change, then we need to consider how this can be accomplished as seriously as we debate mitigation,” says Berrang Ford. “What does adaptation look like? Where are our time and money best spent with respect to adaptations? What targets should we aim for?”

“We should be talking not just about ‘Should we mitigate and who should pay?’ but also ‘How do we move forward with the changes that we are locked into?’ and ‘Can we identify new environmental and economic opportunities through adaptation?’.”

- 30 -

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**Dr. Lea Berrang Ford**, lead author, is an Assistant Professor (Health Geography) in the Department of Geography at McGill University. Dr. Berrang Ford is both a geographer and an epidemiologist, specializing in spatial health analysis of infectious disease and environmental change. Prior to joining McGill, Lea worked with the Public Health Agency of Canada in Saint Hyacinthe (QC) as an environmental epidemiologist and medical geographer, specializing in spatial health analysis, vector-borne zoonotic disease mapping, and environmental health research. You can learn more at [www.leaberrangford.ca](http://www.leaberrangford.ca).

**Dr James D. Ford**, coauthor, is an assistant professor in geography at McGill University. He is widely renowned for his work with Aboriginal communities on climate change vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning, and received a Young Innovator Award from the Canadian government for his innovative community based research. A Nobel Prize winner as a contributing author to the IPCC fourth assessment report, he currently has projects working with Aboriginal communities in the Canadian Arctic to find ways of reducing climate change vulnerability. You can learn more at [www.jamesford.ca](http://www.jamesford.ca).

**Jaclyn Paterson**, coauthor, holds an MSc in Biology and works as a research assistant, studying climate change adaptation with Drs Ford and Berrang-Ford.