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Session Title: Climate Change Challenges, Adaptation Barriers and Responses

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Key session findings and lessons learned; gaps, research needs and approaches identified; take-home message:

Adaptation has been recognized as the key to facing climate change. However, there are important barriers to adaptation, such as biophysical, social, political, psychological, knowledge and financial constraints, etc.

Social issues can act as a barrier to climate change adaptation in a country, e.g. apartheid was a barrier through its associated consequences of high levels of poverty, inadequate education, migration, social inequalities, insufficient motivation and commitment from stakeholders. Another key barrier is that more efforts are being put on mitigation and not sufficiently on adaptation, which is more important in Africa. Others include land tenures systems, responsibilities of local leaders, commitment from Government at local and central levels. Lack of data and human capacity, and insufficient data sharing, remains the major barrier.

Africa needs to unpack all these barriers and understand them better in order to be able to overcome them.

African Governments are not good at understanding things they don't see or that are not tangible, as a result there is not enough long term thinking. Solutions tend to be short term, some of which exacerbate the problem in the long term (maladaptation).
While scientists are aware of the issues involved, it is important to train and educate journalists so they can disseminate information more effectively to the general public as well as to Governments. Scientists also should make an effort to make data more accessible and comprehensive by lay people. There is not enough interaction between scientists and journalists in Africa, unlike on Latin America. The Science for Society programme in South Africa is a good model and should be encouraged in other African countries.

Africa needs to build capacity and develop a critical mass of trained people. This needs to be addressed at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Universities since these are the young people who will be in decision-making positions in a few years. This should be done through more University-Government and University-Government-Industry partnerships.

The approach to overcoming barriers must be a multilayered one, directed at all the different levels of society, and relevant to the African context and mindset.