
How Climate Change and Poverty Issues are Interrelated



Over the last century, the world has seen a sustained decline in the proportion of people living in poverty. However, climate change is a serious risk to poverty reduction and threatens to undo decades of development efforts.

As the *Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development* states, “the adverse effects of climate change are already evident, natural disasters are more frequent and more devastating and developing countries more vulnerable.”

While climate change is a global phenomenon, its negative impacts are more severely felt by poor people and poor countries. They are more vulnerable because of their high dependence on natural resources, and their limited capacity to cope with climate variability and extremes.

While the impacts of climate change and the vulnerability of poor communities to climate change may vary greatly, we know that climate change is superimposed on already existing vulnerabilities. Impoverished communities tend to lack safe drinking water as well as food security and typically lack sufficient financial and technical capacities to manage the daily concerns of life let alone the risks associated with climate change. According to the United Nations Development Program, developing countries suffer 99% of the casualties attributable to climate change.

Some factors in climate change affecting vulnerable persons and communities:

- Changing climate patterns affect the growing seasons. As agricultural zones change, people often cannot grow what they have usually produced. Some areas may adapt to a lengthened growing season but continue to struggle with invasive species thriving in a warmer climate.
- Too much carbon dioxide absorbed by seawater reduces seawater pH and increases acidity, affecting many ocean creatures. This acidification, along with the

warming of the oceans, affects fishing patterns. It has been estimated that as much as 16.5% of human protein intake comes from the oceans.

- The increased frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and storms destroys livelihoods, villages, and economies.
- More than forty small island developing states spread across the Indian and Pacific oceans, the Mediterranean, and the Caribbean face the threat of sea-level rise. Storm surges, flooding, erosion, and even possible inundation threaten the future occupancy of some islands as well as significant threats to their infrastructure, water resources, fisheries, coral reefs, tourism income, and agricultural resources. There is currently a planned relocation for the Carteret islanders, the world's first environmental refugees.



As homes, jobs, way of life, and resources are lost, people are forced to move, often to the cities where there are no jobs, but added vulnerabilities. If the Islanders find a country to take them in, they will most likely start at the bottom of the economic ladder in building a new life.

For us in well-off countries, coping with climate change has largely been a matter of adjusting thermostats, dealing with longer, hotter summers, and observing seasonal shifts. For those in poverty, weather-related disasters and unproductive harvests can push them further into poverty.

*- Photos by Sr. Celestina Velosa Freitas, OP
Promoter of Justice for DSI*
