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## MEDIA BRIEF

# What does climate change mean for developing countries?

Poor people – who are least responsible for the climate crisis and least able to cope with its effects – are already being hit hard by multiple climate change impacts.

Climate change is hitting across every issue linked to poverty and development - from health to culture, safety, food, livelihoods and water - right across the developing world. Without action it could reverse 50 years of work to end poverty, according to Oxfam International's recent report "[Suffering the Science - Climate Change, People and Poverty](#)".

### HUNGER

Hunger will be one of the biggest impacts of climate change and quite possibly the defining human tragedy of this century. Three out of four of the world's poorest people are at immediate risk of crop failures and loss of livestock.

People across the world are seeing a radical change in the seasons they have depended on for millennia. Farmers can no longer trust the weather – they no longer know when to plant or what to plant– they are losing crop after crop and thousands of communities are facing hunger and destitution as a result.

The effect of climate change on agriculture across the world will be grossly unbalanced. Whilst rising temperatures may initially see little impacts from climate change, sub-Saharan Africa alone will lose \$2 billion a year as the viability of just one crop, maize, declines.

### HEALTH

Climate change will be among the most important drivers of disease this century. Diseases that have long been geographically bound are migrating, bringing them to new populations with no knowledge of or immunities to them.

Many outdoor workers – including millions of women - are facing the harsh choice of risking their lives and health or reducing their income because it's too hot to work throughout the day. A two-degree rise in temperature could see a rapid reduction in people's ability to carry out their jobs worldwide, with a potential 30 per cent loss in some of the world's hottest spots.

According to the WHO, 300,000 people die a year because of climate change.

### DISASTERS

Climate related disasters – storms, floods, droughts and wildfires – have been increasing in frequency at an extraordinary rate. 375 million people may be at risk of climate change disasters by 2015 – more than the entire population of the United States.

Poor people – and especially women - suffer worst from natural disasters. In rich countries the average number of deaths per disaster is 23. In poor countries this rises to 1052. In rich countries the cost of disaster falls on insurance companies. In the poor countries it falls to the people.

### WATER

Access to clean, safe water is central to survival and community. Without it livelihoods, communities, families and social structures are destroyed.

Water is an ongoing source of conflict. Climate change is aggravating this as water dries up or becomes contaminated and drives migration.

Climate change is destroying the world's glaciers and with it ancient communities that have depended on glacial water for thousands of years. Major cities also risk collapse due to glacial melt.

## **MIGRATION & CONFLICT**

There are an estimated 26 million climate-change refugees today. By 2050, 200 million people a year may be on the move due to hunger, environmental degradation and loss of land because of climate change.

As climate change puts ever greater pressure on limited resources - such as water – conflict is likely to increase: 46 countries with a combined population of 2.7 billion now face the threat of violence due to climate change

Migration due to climate change is becoming a pressing worry for rich world governments, not least because of perceived threats to their security.

## **How can poor countries adapt to a changing climate?**

Adapting to climate change means countries and communities taking early action to reduce their vulnerabilities and build their resilience to these new and heightened risks, to reduce the damaging impact that climate change will have on their lives and livelihoods. Examples of adaptation:

- To cope with increased flooding: upgrading national flood early warning systems and raising community awareness; building new homes and schools on raised foundations; building high platforms for emergency flood shelter; integrating flood risks into governmental planning and budget processes; creating a community-based action plan for responding to floods.
- To cope with lower, more erratic rainfall: upgrading national meteorological systems and medium-term forecasts; researching, testing and growing drought-tolerant crop varieties; installing efficient, low-cost irrigation systems; installing rain-water harvesting systems; spreading water-conserving farming practices.
- To cope with more severe hurricanes: upgrading hurricane early warning systems and community awareness; planting a mangrove 'bio-shield' along the coast to diffuse storm waves; changing building regulations to reinforce new infrastructure.

## **What must Europe do?**

- Europe has the potential to lead the world into a vital new global deal that keeps global warming below two degrees and protects the poorest, most vulnerable countries. But it must put real substance behind its rhetoric, as soon as possible.
- Europe must bring to the global negotiating table a commitment to cut its emissions by at least 40% by 2020 on 1990 levels, in line with the science, and to offer €35 billion every year to help developing countries adapt to the impacts of global warming rich caused and develop in a low carbon way. This money needs to be additional to existing 0.7% aid commitments: the EU must not force poor countries to choose between building flood defences and building schools.
- Europe must avoid repeating mistakes from the past: it must put aside internal budget wrangling, it must resist its industrial lobbies, and it must stop treating climate talks as if they were trade negotiations. Its current tactics are entirely inappropriate for the vital, large-scale deal needed to stop disastrous climate change. The costs of inaction now are too high, in both human and economic terms.

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