

Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development
and the twenty-fifth session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority theme: Promoting empowerment of people in achieving
poverty eradication, social integration and full employment
and decent work for all**

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(ECOSOC).**

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Statement

The majority of the adverse effects of climate change will disproportionately impact those living in poverty throughout the world. Their increased vulnerability due to poor infrastructure and little or no funding for adaptation or mitigation will lead to greater hunger, disease and malnutrition. Climate change will negate the gains made through the Millennium Development Goals and inhibit the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all.

Climate change and the environment

In 1972 the Club of Rome' study, *Limits to Growth*, pointed out that "the human burden on the ecosystem was rapidly approaching the limits of what the planet could sustain". More recently, according to the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*, "Human actions are depleting Earth's natural capital, putting such strain on the environment that the ability of the planet's ecosystem to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted."

Erosion, land degradation, deforestation, pollution of the atmosphere and water are occurring in many places, but the effects on those living in developing countries, especially small island states, are far greater than in the developed countries. Health impacts include an increase in heat stress, malaria, dengue fever, cholera, and other water-borne diseases. An increase in floods, droughts, and more severe storms is leading to an increase in migration which, in turn, contributes to the spread of disease.

Unpredictable rainfall and seasonal shifts are negatively affecting people's livelihoods in the agricultural sector which accounts for the largest number of laborers in developing countries. Fisheries also, an important source of income for many in small island states, are being adversely affected as sea temperatures rise. In addition, those countries which depend on tourism for a major source of income are dealing with the loss of coral reefs and other coastal attractions which draw tourists.

Climate change and social development

Multiple social factors are contributing to the vulnerability of those living in developing countries. These include, but are not limited to, a rapid increase in population, endemic poverty, lack of educational opportunities and access to healthcare, gender inequality, a lack of access to water, poor sanitation, and high levels of unemployment.

Migration caused by changing climatic conditions undermines agricultural economies and is leading to a breakdown in family structures. Droughts, floods, unpredictable rainfall and rising temperatures are forcing farmers to leave the land. Many men are now traveling to urban areas to secure employment leaving families behind and disrupting traditional ways of living.

Women, who form a disproportionately large share of those living in poverty, are highly dependent on local natural resources to secure water, food and energy for cooking and heating, are finding it more and more difficult to secure these resources. This often leads to difficult choices such as pulling children out of school thus exacerbating the cycle of poverty. Women also face historical disadvantages in that they have limited access to decision-making, economic assets and land rights.

Climate change and economic development

The current development model based on increasing production and consumption is no longer sustainable. This model, championed by the advanced countries, has given the large transnational corporations and financial institutions which currently dominate the global economy the right to accumulate profit at all costs. This includes labor exploitation and resource extraction at the expense of the developing countries and has led to greater hunger, inequality, landlessness, unemployment, indebtedness, loss of incomes and social protections, lack of educational opportunities and access to healthcare, forced migration, and resource depletion.

Transnational agribusinesses now dominate marketing, production, agricultural inputs and trading in agricultural futures and options. This creates intolerable situations for small farmers and consumers, especially those living in poverty, because it forces them to trade in a less competitive environment. This reality contributes to the loss of small farms and the exodus to urban environments for employment.

Both economists and environmentalists are increasingly pointing to the connection between environmental damage and economic loss. In the words of former U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson, "The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment, not the other way around."

Climate change and social stability

Climate change is not the sole cause of violent conflicts, but it does serve as a trigger when resources are scarce. It creates conditions that lead to social destabilization and obstructs the implementation of policies that promote poverty eradication, thus contributing to the marginalization and vulnerability of people living in poverty. Civil conflict further degrades

Earth's life support systems –the atmosphere, land and oceans-adding to the threats to human security brought on by violent conflict.

Grassroots examples

- Our members on the ground in one Asian country did a 20 year study of the effects of climate change on a single village. Their findings include:
 - A significant decrease in rainfall and higher temperatures;
 - An area that once grew abundant wheat and rice can no longer sustain those crops and has had to find more heat resistant crops which are less nutritious;
 - Pigs and goats have replaced the rearing of traditional animals such as buffalo and cows due to a shortage of fodder and the depletion of forests and water sources;
 - There is a sharp rise in wage labor - for six months each year the adult male members of the community now leave for the big cities in search of employment;
 - Those who are not migrant workers (women and children) go to the nearby towns and wait in the hope that someone may hire them for any kind of work; women are also engaged in selling firewood from the nearby forest.

In the words of one of our members, “When the climate becomes the enemy of the people, the end results will be fear, frustration, and food insecurity. A way of life is disappearing.”

- In an island chain in the South Pacific our members report the following :
 - More severe weather events;
 - Waves salinating the taro patches and threatening food security;
 - A shift in rainfall and weather patterns;
 - Seasons which are becoming increasingly longer, hotter and drier;
 - Extensive damage to reefs which protect shorelines from storm surges and serve as homes to marine life;
 - Coral bleaching and the increased acidification of the ocean.

These islands rely heavily on tourism as a major source of income and this is threatened with the destruction of the reefs.

Recommendations

1. Develop accounting mechanisms that include the environmental costs of production.
2. Incorporate the social, economic and environmental impacts of climate change into policy making for poverty eradication.
3. Improve access to high-quality information about the impacts of climate change and share technology with all stakeholders.
4. Shift policy priorities and mainstream climate change into development planning at all scales and levels in all sectors.
5. Empower communities and all stakeholders so that they participate actively in vulnerability assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of adaptation plans.

6. Integrate the role of climate change into international peace and security initiatives and humanitarian interventions.

Conclusion

In the words of Ms. Navi Pillay at the Human Rights Council Seminar on “The Adverse Impacts of Climate Change on the Full Enjoyment of Human Rights” in February 2012: “The effects of climate change will be most acutely felt by those segments of the population whose rights’ protections are already precarious due to factors such as poverty, gender, age, minority status, migrant status and disability. Certain groups, such as women, children indigenous peoples and rural communities, are more exposed to climate change effects and risks. The poorest women and men in the developing South – who have contributed least to global warming – find their livelihoods most threatened, yet have the weakest voice and least influence on climate policy. As it happens, the most dramatic impacts of climate change are expected to occur in the world’s poorest countries where rights protections are too often weak.”

Climate change acts as a threat multiplier and leads to increased instability in many of the most vulnerable countries. All of life is interconnected. This bedrock principle must inform our decision-making and concrete actions and impel us to recognize the injustice of excluding the participation, hopes and desires of vulnerable populations from those decisions which affect their very lives.