



AFRICA - Climate Change

Be good stewards of the manifold grace of God". (1 Peter 4:10)

THE FACTS

Since 1990, yearly carbon gas emissions have gone up by about 6 billion metric tons worldwide, more than a 20% increase.

Africa produces less than 4% of the world's greenhouse gases yet nowhere else are the effects of climate change more visible.

Carbon emissions cause climate change. In Africa an average person produces less than 0.1 tons per annum. In Ireland each person produces about 10 tons of carbon emissions.

Thirteen of the past fifteen years have been the warmest years globally since records began.

If the world doesn't wake up to climate change between 75 and 250 million Africans won't have enough water by 2020 and crop production will have fallen by 50%.



THE ISSUE

The carbon emissions of the western and industrialised world, have caused a breakdown in the Earth's temperature regulation system but it is people living in Africa and developing countries who are suffering most from the resulting climate disruption.



African countries account for twenty of the top thirty countries most likely to be severely effected by climate change. China and America, the world's greatest producers of greenhouse gases, are in the medium and low risk categories, while 17 European countries, including Ireland, are deemed to be least at risk.

Climate Change, if left unaddressed will multiply the negative effects of other divisive issues, be they political, social or religious. Tensions around these issues will all be made worse as people are forced to compete for water, food, arable land and space to live.

The life-threatening effects of climate change are already a reality. A 2011 report by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences estimates that climate change caused by human activity already results in *"more than 2 million premature deaths every year. It threatens water and food security, especially among the bottom 3 billion people"* who are too poor to cushion themselves from its effects.

Without urgent, real and practical efforts to mitigate and reverse climate change the number of deaths will multiply and the positive effects of development in poorer countries will be reversed. Displacement of peoples and conflicts will also increase.



THE OBSTACLES

Since the beginning of the economic recession in 2008, the issue of dealing with climate change has been kicked down the road as leaders of Western industrialised countries and of the emerging BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China), have become preoccupied with preserving their own national, economic and political interests.

As a result, annual climate change conferences from Copenhagen 2009 to Rio 2012 were inconclusive. While they did clarify what needs to be done and even set dates for targets to be achieved, preoccupation with the global recession prevented the countries most culpable for greenhouse gas emissions from agreeing to any binding international climate change mitigation measures.

Unlike Africa, these countries have, up to now, either because of their wealth or geographical position been cushioned from the worst effects of climate change. However, this is changing as more and more extreme and destructive weather events are occurring across Europe, the Americas' and elsewhere. In addition there is evidence of more prolonged changes in annual weather patterns negatively affecting agriculture and food production. It is also clear that the longer action against climate change is put off the

more difficult and costly it will be. Yet, in spite of the growing body of scientific and factual evidence supporting the need for urgent mitigation measures, an internationally agreed action plan to tackle climate change continues to be avoided.

Tipping Point: The worry is that consensus for action will be left too late and that an irreversible "tipping-point" leading to catastrophic climate disruption will be reached. If this happens the effects will be devastating not only for developing countries, such as those in Africa, but even for those whose wealth or geography has, up to now, provided protection.

While the principle of prudence requires world leaders to take urgent action to mitigate climate change their will to do so has been paralysed by short-term political and economic self interest.

Time is running out: Kicking the can down the road is no longer an option. In many parts of Africa weather has become unpredictable, people are dying, farmers are facing decreased yields. Many have already been forced off their land. Time is running out but wealthier countries, are conducting "business as usual" when it comes to burning fossil fuels (Ireland is, relatively speaking, still one of these).

Church Voices

"The protection of the environment and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act jointly ... in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet." Pope Benedict XVI, 2009

By continuing to focus irresponsibly on preserving comfort and economic security, developed and industrialised countries are condemning Africans to deprivation, poverty and death. The current complacency will also leave future generations a horrendous legacy.

THE SOLUTION

Climate change is not only an environmental issue but also a humanitarian emergency which affects the world's most vulnerable people. It is therefore, an issue of justice. Justice demands that those who cause climate change must cease doing so and must also support those who suffer its effects. To achieve this, socially just international agreements to tackle climate change must be established.

Mitigation: Countries must agree on cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions to limit the rise in global temperatures to 2 degrees Celsius. This is necessary to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. Two degrees is widely regarded as the maximum "safe" limit beyond which a tipping-point may be reached.

Climate Finance: Countries who are already feeling the impact of climate change must be supported financially to mitigate and adapt to these changes. This funding should be channelled through the UN Green Climate Fund, which was

created at the 2011 climate summit in Durban.

Food and Climate: Problems of food security and climate change are interrelated. For millions of small scale farmers, climate change is experienced as altered weather patterns that put food production at risk. Small-scale, sustainable agriculture must therefore, be promoted and supported as a key element in a comprehensive solution to climate change. It is also vital that agricultural investments are sustainable and benefit the poor without harming the environment.

Source: CIDSE- an umbrella group of 17 Catholic Agencies including Trocaire, CAFOD and Concern.

NEW FACTORS

Fears about a tipping-point are real. It is a fact that polar ice-caps are melting much faster than expected. We are only now becoming aware of the volume of methane gas, previously trapped, that is escaping into the atmosphere as vast areas of permafrost in Alaska and Siberia continue to thaw. This has the potential to accelerate the rate of global warming to an irreversible tipping-point level.

Scientists tell us we must reduce the amount of Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from its current level of 400 parts per million to below 350 ppm, in order to prevent further warming and to stay below the two degree threshold.

Fracking: Another worrying factor is the new technology of hydraulic fracturing developed to harvest previously inaccessible shale oil and gas. This



Time is running out for Africa

technology already widely used in the US and Canada is spreading rapidly to other countries who see it as a quick-fix to reduce energy costs and dependence on imported oil. While the long-term environmental effects of this new technology remain to be seen there are already grave concerns regarding the enormous amounts of water and the cocktail of chemicals that the process requires. It has also been estimated that because of the large energy input required to produce shale oil, that greenhouse gas emissions will be 21% - 47% higher than conventional fuel.

Fracking will also impact negatively on the adoption of alternative energy sources and efforts to become less dependant on hydrocarbons.

The accesability of shale oil and gas, due to fracking technology, creates a dangerous situation that will increase cabon emissions just at a time when reducing them is an absolute imperative.

TEN TONS AND THREE POPES

Ireland is high up in the list of world greenhouse gas producers. the energy we individually use - electricity, fuel etc - produces 10 tons of carbon emissions per annum, one hundred times more than the average African. (See www.breathingearth.net)

We have to change. The earth is not an inexhaustible resource for us to plunder. Our excess is negatively affecting the climate and the lives of people living far away. We do not have the right to more than our fair share – ten tons is way more than a fair share. Our “I’m worth it” attitude and “I deserve it” lifestyle is destroying parts of the earth and people

are suffering as a result. Saving water, recycling, using less electricity, petrol etc. are the minimum we should be doing – but we must do more.

So far, in this young century we have had three Popes, each of whom has expressed deep concerns about how we use and treat the earth. John Paul II spoke of *ecological conversion* and *ecological vocation*. Human beings do not rank above nature but are part of it. Benedict XVI stressed *interior conversion*, a change of attitude away from the love of money and desire for personal comfort that drive the plundering of the world’s resources beyond the limits of nature. Pope Francis has already indicated a view that combines those of his predecessors. He said: “*Let us be renewed by God’s mercy... let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.*”

Christianity implies loving God, neighbour and creation - a trinity in which the loving of each is a prerequisite without which the others cannot be truly loved. As individuals and as communities we must read the signs of the times - climate change rolls on relentlessly and as people of faith we must respond.

These times call us to take up our **ecological vocation**. Implicit is this is the changing of attitudes and the altering of lifestyles in which we use up more than our fair share - thus contributing to the destruction of creation. **We don’t deserve it and we are not, in the sight of God, worth more than others.**

